

THE NUN.

By DIDEROT.

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By ^KDIDEROT. (D)

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VOLUME I.

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THE NUN.

THE answer of the Marquis of Croismare, if he returns me one, will furnish me with the first lines of this recital. Before I wrote to him, I wished to get a little acquainted with his character. He is a man of the world; he distinguished himself in the service; he is advanced in years; he has been married; he has a daughter and two sons, whom he loves, and to whom he is endeared. He is a person of birth, of intelligence, of spirit, of gaiety, of taste for the fine arts, and particularly for originality. He is praised to me for his sensibility, his honour, and his probity: and I find,

from all that I have heard, that I have not exposed myself by addressing him. But it is not to be presumed that he will take an interest in my fortunes without knowing who I am: and it is this circumstance which induces me to conquer my pride and my reluctance by undertaking these memoirs, in which I describe one part of my misfortunes without skill and without art, with the simplicity of a child of my age, and the frankness natural to my character. As my protector may require, or perhaps the whim may seize me to complete them, at a time when the facts shall have ceased to be present to my memory; I have thought that the catastrophe in which they terminate, and the profound impression which it has left upon my mind, and which will never be effaced as long as I live, will suffice to bring them accurately to my recollection.

My

My father was an advocate. He had married my mother when he was considerably advanced in life ; he had three daughters by her. His fortune was more than adequate to settle them comfortably ; but for this purpose it was necessary at least that his affection should be equally divided, and his deficiency in this respect I experienced to my cost. I certainly excelled my sisters in the endowments both of mind and person, and the superiority of my character and talents seemed to be the cause of much uneasiness to my parents. The advantages which nature and application had conferred upon me above my sisters becoming to me a source of endless chagrin ; in order to be loved, endeared, fondled and indulged at all times as they were, I wished from my earliest years to exchange characters with them. If a person chanced to say to

my mother, You have charming children.... this was never understood as applicable to me. I was sometimes avenged of this injustice ; but the praise which I received always cost me so dear when we were alone, that I would much rather have been wronged : the more that strangers shewed a preference for me, the more ill-nature I had to submit to when they were gone. O how often have I lamented not having been born ugly, stupid, silly, proud, in a word, with all those cross-grained qualities which recommended them to my parents ! I would ask myself, whence can proceed this caprice in a father, in a mother, in other respects virtuous, just and pious ? Shall I confess it to you, Sir ? Some expressions which escaped from my father in his anger (for he was very passionate), some circumstances which I have collected at different

different times, some hints of the neighbours, some whisperings of the servants, have led me to suspect a reason which excused them a little. Perhaps my father had some doubt respecting my birth; perhaps I recalled to my mother a fault which she had committed, or the ingratitude of a man whom she had loved too well: how can I tell? But though all these suppositions be erroneous, what harm is there in communicating them to you? You will burn the letter, and I promise to burn your answers. As there were but short intervals between our coming into the world, we all three grew up together. We had some suitors. My eldest sister was courted by a charming young man. I soon perceived that he took particular notice of me, and that I was becoming the object of his assiduities. I felt that this preference would soon draw

upon me a great deal of ill will, and I told my mother of it. It is perhaps the only thing in my life that ever I did with which she was pleased ; and this was the way she took to reward me for it. Four days after, or at least in a few days, she informed me that they had determined to send me to a convent ; and on the next morning I was conducted thither. My situation was so uncomfortable at home, that this event gave me very little uneasiness, and I repaired to Saint Mary's, which was my first convent, with a great deal of cheerfulness. In the mean while my sister's galant, not seeing me, forgot me, and became her husband. His name is Mr. R*** : he is a notary, and lives at Corbeil, where they make the most unhappy couple in the world. My second sister was married to a Mr. Baurchon, a silk-mercier in Quincampoix Street,

Street, at Paris, and lives with him pretty comfortably.

My two sisters being settled, I supposed that they would think of me, and that I should get out of the convent. I was then sixteen and a half years of age. They had given considerable portions to my sisters; I promised myself a fortune equal to theirs, and my head was filled with flattering schemes, when I was summoned to the parlour. It was Father Seraphin, my mother's director; he had been mine also, so that he had no difficulty in explaining to me the motive of his visit: his object was to make me assume the habit of a nun. I remonstrated against this strange proposition, and plainly declared to him that I had no taste for the Convent. So much the worse, said he to me, for your parents have so exhausted their means upon

your sisters, that I cannot see what they can do for you in the narrow circumstances to which they are reduced. Consider, Mademoiselle, you must either enter for ever into this house, or go to some country convent, where they will receive you for a moderate salary, and from which you can only depart at the death of your parents, an event for which you may have to wait a long time. . . . I complained bitterly, and shed a flood of tears. The Superior was informed of it, and waited my return from the parlour. I was in a confusion seemingly unaccountable. She said to me, And what's the matter with you, my dear child ? (she knew better than I did what was the matter.) How you look ! But I never saw any distress equal to yours ; you make me tremble. Is it because you have lost your father or mother ?—I once thought of throwing myself

myself into her arms and saying, Would to God ! I contented myself with replying, I have neither father nor mother ; I am an unfortunate wretch whom they have forgotten, and whom they wish to entomb alive.—She let the storm pass over, and waited for the moment of returning tranquillity. I explained to her more clearly what had just been announced to me. She seemed to have pity on me ; she embraced me, she encouraged me not to enter into a state for which I had no relish ; she promised to entreat, to remonstrate, and to solicit in my behalf. O Sir ! how these Superiors are enveloped in artifice ! you have no idea of them. In fact she wrote. She well knew the answers which they would make her ; she communicated them to me : it was a considerable time before I began to doubt her sincerity. In the mean time
the

the period which they had fixed for my declaring my resolution, arrived; she came and informed me of it with the most studied appearance of concern. At first she stopped without speaking, she then uttered a few accents of sorrow; after which I discovered the rest. This was still a distressing scene; I shall have few of a different kind to describe to you. The art of containing themselves is that in which of all others they most excel. She then said to me (in truth I believe she was crying at the time): Alas! then, my child, you are going to leave us! my dear child, we shall never see you more! and other ejaculations which I did not hear. I threw myself down upon a chair; I was silent, I cried, I was motionless; I rose and walked about, sometimes leaning against the walls, at other times pouring forth my grief into her bosom.

Conceive

Conceive what I felt when she added :
But might not you do one thing ? Consider, but don't you go to say that I advised you ; you can keep a secret : I would not for all the world that there was any reproach upon my character. What is it that they desire of you ? that you take the veil ? Well ! why not take it ? What engagement does this lay you under ? None ; to stay two years longer* with us. We don't know who may die in the course of that time, or who may live it out : two years is a considerable period ; some fortunate circumstances may intervene before the end of two years. She accompanied this insidious proposal with so many caresses, so many protestations of friendship, so many insinuating falsehoods ! I knew where I was, I did not know where they might put me, and I suffered myself to be persuaded.

ded. She wrote then to my father ; her letter was very well : oh ! for this purpose it could not have been better : my anxiety, my grief, my remonstrances, were not dissembled ; I assure you that a girl of greater penetration than I was would have been deceived by it. In the mean while the matter was concluded by my giving my consent. With what expedition every thing was prepared ! the day was fixed, my dress was made up, the moment of the ceremony arrived without a moment's interval. I forgot to tell you, that I saw my father and mother, that I tried every expedient to touch their feelings, and that I found them inflexible. It was a M. Abbé Blin, a Doctor of the Sorbonne, who exhorted me, and M. the Bishop of Alep, who gave me the dress. This ceremony was not gay of itself ; the day on which it was performed was one of the
most

most sorrowful: though the nuns thronged round to support me, twenty times I felt my knees shake, and was like to fall upon the steps of the altar. I heard nothing, I saw nothing, I was stupid; they carried me, and I went; they interrogated me, and they answered the questions for me. At length this cruel ceremony was concluded; all the strangers withdrew, and I remained among the flock to which I had just been united. My companions came round me; they embraced me, and said: But look at my sister, how handsome she is! how this black veil relieves the paleness of her complexion! how well this bandeau becomes her! how it rounds her face! how it extends her cheeks! how this habit displays her waist and her arms! I listened to them with pain, I was distressed: at the time I found it necessary to agree with them; when I

was alone in my cell, I remembered their flatteries, and could not refrain from putting them to the test in my little mirror, but I thought them not altogether false. There were some honours attached to this day ; they increased them on my account. I paid little attention to them ; but they affected to think and say the contrary, though it was clear they had no reason. At night, on coming out from prayers, the Superior repaired to my cell. Troth, said she after a little consideration, I know not why you expressed so much reluctance to assume this dress ; it makes you a wonder, you are quite charming ; Sister Susan is a very pretty Nun : we shall love you the better for that. Here, let us see you walk. . . . You don't keep yourself upright enough, it is not necessary that you stoop. . . . She set right my head, feet, hands, waist, and arms,
it

it was almost as good as a lesson of Marcelle upon the monastic graces, for every condition has its own. She then sat down, and said to me : It is very well ; but let us now talk a little seriously. Before the lapse of two years your parents may have altered their resolution ; and even you yourself may wish to remain here when they wish to take you away ; this is not impossible.—Madam, don't believe it.—You have been a long time amongst us, but you are still unacquainted with our mode of life ; it certainly has its pains, but it also has its pleasures.... You doubt the truth of every thing I say of the world and of the cloister, but every condition bears the same inscription ; for I thank God ! they made me read all the monks have said of their state, which they know well, and which they detest ; and of the world, which they
love,

love, against which they rail, but with which they are unacquainted.

I shall not enter into a long detail respecting my noviciate : if it were a fair specimen of the austerity of the convent, one could not have so much objection to it, but it is the most pleasant period of the monastic life. A mother of novices is the most indulgent sister that they can find. She makes it her study to divest the condition of every thing that is unpleasant : it is a course of the most artful and refined seduction. She thickens the surrounding darkness, she lulls you into tranquillity, she decoys you into her snares, she fascinates you. Ours was particularly attached to me. I do not believe that any young soul without experience could be proof against this fatal art. The world has its precipices, but I don't imagine that the descent to them is so easy. If I had a cold, my
presence

presence was dispensed with at service, at penance, and at prayers ; I went early to bed, I rose late, I was exempted from discipline. Conceive, Sir, that there were some days in which I would have sighed for the moment of sacrificing myself. There are no distressing occurrences which pass in the world of which they do not speak to you ; they arrange facts, they fabricate stories, and then it is praises without end, and the operation of the grace of God, which prevent you from incurring these humiliating disgraces. In the mean while, the period drew near which I had sometimes hastened by my wishes. Then I awaked from my dream ; I felt my reluctance return with increased strength. I went to inform the superior, or the mother of our novices. These women take ample vengeance for the trouble you occasion

them; for it is not to be thought that they have any amusement in the hypocritical part which they act, as from the foolish things which they are under the necessity of so often repeating to you, the task becomes in the end stale and disgusting to them; but they undertake it for the sake of bringing a thousand crowns into their house. This is the important object for which they lead a life of deceit, and prepare forty or fifty years of despair, and perhaps eternal misery for young innocents; for it is certain, that of every hundred nuns who die before they reach the age of fifty, there are fifty damned, exclusive of those who become foolish, stupid, or mad in the prospect.

One day, a nun of the last description happened to escape from the cell in which she was confined. I saw her. This, Sir, is the moment in which

my good or bad fortune must be irrevocably fixed, according as you act by me. I never saw any thing so frightful. Her hair was dishevelled, and her body almost naked; she dragged iron chains; her eyes were wild, she tore her hair, she beat her breast with her fists; she ran, she roared; she imprecated upon herself and others the most dreadful curses; she wanted to throw herself out at a window. Terror seized me, I trembled at every joint, I saw my fate in that of this unfortunate wretch, and I immediately resolved in my mind to die a thousand times rather than to encounter it. They perceived the effect which this incident would have upon my spirits, and they endeavoured to prevent it. They told me I know not how many absurd and contradictory stories about this nun: that her intellects were deranged before she

came to the house ; that she had had a terrible fright at a critical time ; that she had become subject to visions ; that she thought she held intercourse with angels ; that some preachers of an extravagant morality had so terrified her about the judgments of God, that her disordered brain had been turned by the description ; that she saw nothing but demons, hell, and gulphs of fire ; that they had been very unlucky ; that it was a thing quite unheard of before in their house, and I know not what. This made no impression upon me. Every moment the mad nun recurred to my mind, and I renewed the oath of never taking a vow.

The period arrived at which it became necessary for me to show whether I could keep my word. One morning after service, the Superior entered my cell. She held a letter in her hand.

Her

Her looks were sorrowful and dejected. Her arms sunk ; it seemed as if she had not power to lift up the letter ; she looked at me ; tears stood in her eyes ; we were both silent ; she waited till I should speak ; I was tempted to begin first, but I contained myself. She asked me how I did ; she observed that service had been very long to-day ; that I had a little cough ; that I appeared to be indisposed. To all this I answered—No, my dear mother. She still kept the letter in her hand, which was hanging down ; while she was putting these questions, she put it upon her knee, and her hand in part concealed it ; at last, after having put some questions respecting my father and mother, finding that I did not ask what this paper was, she said, Here is a letter..... When she uttered this word, I felt my heart quake, and I added in

a trembling voice: Is it from my mother?—It is; take and read it...—I recovered myself a little; I took the letter; I read it at first with tolerable firmness; but as I advanced, terror, indignation, resentment, contempt, succeeding one another in my breast, I displayed different tones, different voices, and different motions. Sometimes I scarcely held the paper, at other times I held it as if I meant to tear it, and at other times I grasped it with violence as if I had been tempted to twist it in my hand and throw it away.—Alas! my child, what answer shall we make to this?—Madam, you know best.—No, I do not know. The times are unfortunate, your family has sustained some losses; your sister's affairs are embarrassed; they both have a number of children; your parents impoverished themselves by marrying them, they are ruining themselves

themselves in order to support them. It is impossible that they can make any permanent settlement upon you ; you have assumed the habit, they have been at some expence ; by taking this step you have made them conceive some hopes ; they have announced to their acquaintances, that you are immediately about to commence the profession. At all events, you may depend upon every assistance which I can give you. I have never enticed any person into a convent ; it is a state into which we are conducted by the voice of God, and it is extremely dangerous to blend our voice with his. I shall never attempt to speak to your heart, if grace is silent ; hitherto I never have had to reproach myself with the misfortunes of any person, and I should not wish to begin with you, my child, you who are so dear to me. I have not forgotten

that it was at my persuasion that you took the first steps, and I will not suffer them to take advantage of this to bring you into engagements contrary to your inclination. Let us consider then together, let us concert. Do you wish to make profession?—No, Madam.—You have no relish for the religious state?—No, Madam.—You will not obey your parents?—No, Madam.—What do you wish to be then?—Anything but a nun. I do not wish to be one, I will not be one.—Well, you shall not be one. Let us deliberate and draw up an answer to your mother....—We agreed in some ideas. She wrote, and showed me the answer, which seemed to be very proper. In the mean time, they sent the director of the house to me; they sent me the doctor who had pronounced the discourse in my praise when I assumed the habit; they recommended me

me to the mother of the novices; I saw M, the Bishop of Alep; I had to enter the lists with some pious women whom I did not know, but who took an interest in my affairs; I had continual conferences with monks and priests; my father came, my sisters wrote to me; at last my mother appeared: I resisted them all. In the mean while, the day was fixed for my profession: they omitted nothing to obtain my consent; but when they saw that all their solicitations were to no purpose, they resolved to proceed without it.

They shut me up in my cell, they imposed silence upon me; I was separated from all the world, abandoned to myself; and I saw that they were determined to dispose of me without consulting me any farther. I did not wish to take the vows, it was a settled point with me; and all the false or real terrors
which

which they inflicted upon me, did not shake my purpose. In the mean time I was in a most deplorable state, I did not know how long it might last; and if it ceased, I knew still less what was to become of me. Amid these uncertainties, I adopted a plan of conduct of which you will form whatever judgment, Sir, you please. I saw no person, neither the superior, nor the mother of the novices, nor my companions. I sent notice to the first, pretending to be reconciled to the will of my parents; but my design was to put an end to this persecution, by rendering it notorious, and publicly to protest against the violent measures which they had in contemplation. I said that she was mistress of my fortune, that she might dispose of it according to her wishes, that she might require of me to take the vows, and I should do it.

Conceive

Conceive the joy which was diffused through the whole house, the caresses renewed with every species of flattery and seduction. “God had spoken to
“ my heart, there was no person fitter
“ than I for the state of perfection.
“ It was impossible for this not to happen, they had always expected it,
“ Those did not discharge their duty
“ with so much profit and constancy
“ who were not really called. The
“ mother of the novices had never seen,
“ in any of her pupils, a call so truly
“ characteristic ; she was quite surprised at the cross fit that I had
“ taken, but she had always told our
“ mother superior to persevere, and
“ that it would pass over ; that the best
“ nuns had moments of a similar kind,
“ that they proceeded from suggestions
“ of the evil spirit, who always redoubled his efforts when he was on
the

“ the point of losing his prey ; that I
“ was about to make my escape from
“ him ; that my path henceforth would
“ be strewed with roses ; that the re-
“ straints of the religious life would
“ appear to me to be the more support-
“ able, because I had greatly exag-
“ gerated them ; that this sudden pres-
“ sure of the yoke was a favour of
“ heaven, for the purpose of after-
“ wards lightening it.....” It appeared
to me rather singular that the same
thing should proceed from God and
the Devil, according as they might
think proper to view it. There are
many circumstances similar to this
which occur in the convent ; and I have
often been told, by way of consolation
by some, that my thoughts were the
instigations of Satan, and by others,
that they were the inspirations of God.
The same evil proceeds from God by
whom

whom we are tried, and from the Devil by whom we are tempted.

I conducted myself with prudence. I thought I could answer for myself. I saw my father, he spoke to me coldly; I saw my mother, she embraced me; I received letters of congratulation from my sisters, and a great many others. I knew that it would be a M. Sornen, Vicar of Saint-Roch, who would preach the sermon, and M. Thierry, Chancellor of the University, who would receive my vows. Every thing went on well till the evening before the important day; only after being informed that the ceremony would be private, that there would be few people there, and that the church-door would be open only to my parents, I invited, by means of the maid of the turning-box, every person in the neighbourhood, my male and female friends; I had permission

mission to write to some of my acquaintances. All this company, whom they did not expect, presented themselves; it was necessary to permit them to come in, and the assembly was almost as numerous as my plan required. O Sir! what a dreadful night the preceding was to me! I did not lie down. I sat upon my bed, I raised my hands to heaven, and called God to witness the violence which they were going to offer me. I represented to myself the part which I was to act at the foot of the altar—a young girl loudly protesting against an action to which she seemed to have consented; the scandal of the by-standers, the distress of the nuns, the fury of my parents. O God! what is to become of me?..... While I was pronouncing these words I was seized with a general faintness, I fell in a swoon upon my
bolster;

bolster; a general coldness, in which my knees shook, and my teeth chattered, succeeded the swoon, and this coldness was followed by a burning heat. My mind was troubled. I do not remember undressing myself, nor going out of my cell; but I was found naked to my shift, stretched upon the ground at the door of my Superior, motionless, and almost dead. I have learned these things since. In the morning I found myself in my cell with the Superior, the mother of the novices, and some of those whom they call assistants, round my bed. I was very much distressed. They put some questions to me; they saw from my answers that I had no knowledge of what had passed, and they did not tell me of it. They asked me how I did, if I persisted in my holy resolution, and if I found myself
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in a condition to support the fatigue of the day. I answered in the affirmative, and, contrary to their expectation, no derangement of the plan took place.

Every thing had been arranged on the preceding evening. They rung the bells to let the world know that they were about to add another to the list of the unfortunate. They came to dress me ; it was a toilette day. Now, when I recollect all these ceremonies, there seems to be in them something solemn and affecting for a young innocent, whose inclination is not averse to them. They conducted me to the church, they performed high mass. The good Vicar, who gave me credit for a resignation which I did not possess, preached a long sermon, which was every word inapplicable to me : there was something very ridiculous in what he said of my happiness, my
grace,

grace, my courage, my zeal, my fervour, and all those fine sentiments which he supposed that I felt. In the mean while, the contrast between this eulogium and the step which I was about to take, troubled me; I was staggered for a few moments, but my uncertainty did not last long. It only taught me better than I had learnt before, that I was deficient in those qualities which are necessary to constitute a good nun. At last the dreadful moment arrived. When it was necessary for me to enter the place, where I was to take my vows, I could not walk; two of my companions took me by the arms, and, with my head leaning upon one of them, they dragged me along. I knew not what passed in the hearts of the bye-standers; but at the sight of a young victim carried dying to the altar, on all sides sighs and sobbings burst forth,

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forth, among which, I am sure, those of my father and mother were not heard. The assembly rose up : there were some young persons mounted upon the chairs, and hanging by the bars of the railing ; a profound silence was observed, and the priest who presided at my profession said to me : Maria-Susannah Simonin, do you promise to tell the truth ?—I promise.—Do you come here of your own accord, with good will ? I answered, No ; but those who accompanied me answered, Yes. — Maria-Susannah Simonin, do you promise to God, chastity, poverty, and obedience ?—I hesitated a moment, the priest waited, and I replied, No, Sir.—He repeated : Maria-Susannah Simonin, do you promise to God, chastity, poverty, and obedience ? I replied in a firmer tone : No, Sir, no.—He stopped, and said to me : Recollect yourself, my child, and
listen

listen to me.—Sir, said I to him, you ask me if I promise to God, chastity, poverty, and obedience? I understood you perfectly, and I answered you no.... And turning round to the bystanders, among whom considerable murmuring had arisen, I made a sign that I wished to speak; the murmurs ceased, and I said: “Sirs, and you in particular, my father and mother, I take you all to witness.....” When I uttered these words, one of the sisters let fall the veil over the railing, and I saw that it was to no purpose to speak. The nuns surrounded me, and loaded me with reproaches; I heard them without saying a word. They conducted me to my cell, where they locked me in.

Being left alone to my reflections, I began to take courage and to consider my conduct, of which I did not repent.

I saw that, after the notoriety which I had occasioned, it was impossible I could long remain here, and that perhaps they would not dare to take me back into the convent. I did not know what they intended to do with me, but I was sensible there was nothing worse than for one to become a nun contrary to inclination. I lived in confinement without hearing a single word from any person. Those who brought me my victuals, came in, put my dinner down upon the floor, and went away without speaking. In about a month they brought me a secular habit, when I put off that of the house; the Superior came, and told me to follow her. I followed her to the door of the convent, where I went into a carriage; I there found my mother alone, waiting for me; I sat down before her, and the carriage set off. We continued opposite one another

another for some time, without saying a word : I kept my eyes downward, and did not presume to look her in the face. I know not what passed in my mind, but all on a sudden I threw myself at her feet, and leaned my head upon her knees : I said nothing, but sobbed till I was almost stifled. She repelled me harshly without speaking. I did not rise ; the blood sprang from my nose ; I seized one of her hands in spite of her, and bathing it with a stream of blood and tears, putting my mouth upon her hand, I kissed it, and said to her : You are still my mother, I am still your child. . . . She answered me, pushing me from her with greater violence, and tearing her hand from between mine at the same time : Rise, wretch, rise. — I obeyed her, I rose up, and drew my hood over my face. She had assumed such an air of authority and sternness,

that I dared not look at her. My tears, and the blood which flowed from my nose mingling together, ran down my arms till I was all besmeared before I was aware of it. From some words that she dropt, I conceived that her robe and linen were stained with it, and that this offended her. We arrived at the house, where I was conducted to a small room which was prepared for me. I threw myself down upon my knees on the stair-case: I held by her clothes; but all that I could obtain from her was a contemptuous cast of the head, with an expression of indignation from her mouth and eyes, which you can conceive better than I can describe.

I entered my new prison, where I passed six months, soliciting in vain the favour of speaking to her, of seeing my father, or of writing to them: I was served with provisions and attended:

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a domestic accompanied me to mass on holy days, and locked me up. I read, I worked, I wept, I sung, and in this manner did I pass my days. A secret sentiment supported me, and it was the consciousness that I was free, and that my lot, cruel as it was, might change. But it was decided that I was to be a Nun, and I was one.

So much inhumanity, so much obstinacy on the part of my parents, completely confirmed the suspicion I had entertained respecting my birth. I could never find any other principles on which they could be excused. My mother seemed to fear lest I should one day object to the mode in which they had divided their property, lest I should demand my legitim, and associate a natural child with legitimate offspring. But what was only conjecture, is in time to be realized.

While I was confined in the house, I performed few exterior exercises of religion, yet I was always sent to confession on the eve of great holidays ; I have mentioned that I had the same director as my mother. I conversed with him, I explained all the rigour of treatment which I had experienced from my parents for about three years. He was acquainted with it all. I complained particularly of my mother with bitterness and resentment. This priest had entered late into the religious state; he was humane. He heard me with tranquillity, and said to me : My child, pity your mother, pity still more than you blame her. Her heart is good ; be assured that it is against her will that she acts in this manner. — Against her will, Sir ! and who can constrain her to observe this conduct ? Did she not give me birth ? and what difference is there

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there

there between my sisters and me?—
A great deal!—I don't understand the
meaning of your answer. I was
proceeding in a comparison between my
sisters and me, when he stopped me
and said: Go, go, inhumanity is not
the vice of your parents; endeavour
to bear your lot with patience, and at
least to make it a merit before God.
I will see your mother, and be assured
that to serve you, I will use all the
ascendancy which I possess over her
mind. That *great deal* which he
had mentioned, was a ray of light.
I no longer doubted the truth of what
I had thought concerning my birth.
The Saturday following, about half
past five in the evening, when day was
almost gone, the servant girl who was
employed to serve me, came up stairs
and said: Madam, your mother says
that you must dress. . . . An hour after:
Madam

Madam says that you must go down stairs with me. At the door I found a coach, which the servant and I entered, and I learnt that we were going to the Feuillans, to Father Seraphin. He expected us, he was alone. The domestic retired, and I entered the parlour. I sat down, uneasy and curious to hear what he had to tell me. He spoke to me as follows : The severe conduct of your parents is about to be explained to you ; I have obtained your mother's permission. You are discreet ; you have spirit and firmness ; you are of an age when you might even be entrusted with a secret, in which you were not yourself concerned. It is a long while since I first advised your mother to reveal to you that with which you are to be made acquainted ; but she could never summon resolution for the task,

task. It is hard for a mother to confess to a child a serious fault ; you know her character ; it does not consist with that species of humiliation which a certain avowal would involve. She imagined that without this resource she would be able to bring you to her views ; she has been mistaken ; the circumstance has grieved her. She now recurs to my advice, and she herself has given me orders to announce to you, that you are not the daughter of M. Simonin.—I instantly replied, I had suspected it.—Consider now, Mademoiselle, observe, weigh, judge whether your mother could without the consent, or even with the consent of your father, place you upon an equal footing with children whose sister you are not ; if she could confess to your father a fact of which already he entertains but too much suspicion.—But Sir, who is my father ?—Mademoiselle, that
is

is a point with which I have not been entrusted. It is too certain, Mademoiselle, continued he, that your sisters have obtained prodigious pecuniary advantages over you, and that every imaginable precaution has been taken by marriage contracts, by the dilapidation of their property, by stipulations, by trust deeds, and other methods, to reduce your legitim to nothing, in case you should one day appeal to the laws to make it effectual. If you lose your parents, you will gain little by the event. You refuse a convent; perhaps you will regret that you are not there.—That is impossible, Sir, I ask nothing.—You do not yet know hardships, labour, indigence.—I know at least the value of liberty, and the importance of a situation which we are not called to embrace.—I have told you what I had to communicate: it belongs to you, Mademoiselle, to make
your

your reflections. He then rose—
Sir, yet one question more.—As many as
you please.—Are my sisters acquainted
with what you have told me?—No,
Mademoiselle.—How then could they
have brought themselves to the resolution
of plundering their sister? for such
they consider me.—Ah, Mademoiselle,
interest! interest! they could not other-
wise have obtained the considerable mar-
riages they have found. In the world
all consider themselves only, and I
advise you not to reckon upon them if
you lose your parents. Be assured they
will dispute to a farthing the little por-
tion to be shared among you. They
have a number of children. This pre-
text will be sufficiently plausible to
reduce you to beggary. Besides, it is
no longer in their power to do any
thing; every thing is conducted by their
husbands. Although they might enter-
tain

tain some sentiments of commiseration, the supplies they might afford you without the knowledge of their husbands, would prove a source of domestic divisions. I can only see two alternatives, that even legitimate children are to be abandoned, or children to be supplied at the expense of domestic peace. The bread of charity too, Mademoiselle, is very unpalatable. If you trust to my advice, you will reconcile yourself to your parents ; you will do what your mother has a right to expect from you ; you will enter a convent ; a small pension will be settled upon you, with which you will pass your days, if not happily, at least tolerably. In short, I will not conceal from you that the apparent state of desertion in which you are left by your mother, her obstinacy in confining you in a convent, and some other circumstances

stances which at present I do not recollect, though I knew them at the time, have produced upon your father the very same effect as upon you. He had entertained suspicions of your birth, but it is suspicion no longer; and without being acquainted with the secret, he has no doubt that you only belong to him as a child by the law, which ascribes them to the person who bears the name of husband. Go, Mademoiselle, you are virtuous and considerate, reflect upon what you have now heard.

I rose, and burst into tears. I saw that the Father himself was softened: he mildly raised his eyes to heaven, and led me back. I rejoined the domestic who had accompanied me; we entered the carriage, and returned to the house. It was late. I mused for a part of the night upon the secret which had been revealed to me; I continued to think
upon

upon it in the course of the next day. I had no father; scruples had deprived me of a mother; precautions were taken to defeat my claim to the rights of my legal birth; I was in a rigid domestic captivity, without hope, without resource. Perhaps if this explanation had been sooner made, after my sisters were settled, had they kept me in the house which continued to be frequented, some one might have been found to whom my character, my spirit, my figure, my talents, would have appeared a sufficient dowry. The thing was not yet impossible, but the noise I had excited in the convent, rendered it more unlikely. It was not easy to be conceived that a girl of between seventeen and eighteen years of age could proceed to such extremities without a firmness very uncommon. Men are loud in their praises of this quality, but I think they willingly dispense with it in those whom they intend to espouse.

espouse. This, however, was a resource to be attempted before any other alternative was embraced. I adopted that of disclosing my sentiments to my mother, and I requested a conversation with her, which was granted.

It was in winter. She was seated in an arm chair before the fire ; her countenance was stern, her eye fixed, and her features unmoved. I approached her, I threw myself at her feet, and I asked pardon for all the faults I had committed. It is by what you are now to tell me, answered she, that you must deserve it. Rise ; your father's absence gives you an opportunity to explain yourself. You have seen Father Seraphin ; you now know who you are, and what you may expect from me, if your design is not to punish me the whole of my life for a fault which I have already but too dearly expiated. Well then, Made-

moiselle, what do you wish me to do? What have you resolved?—Mamma, replied I, know that I have nothing, and that I ought to pretend to nothing. I am very far from being disposed to add to your sufferings, of whatever nature they may be. Perhaps you would have found me more submissive to your will, had you informed me sooner of certain circumstances which it was difficult for me to suspect; but now I know them; I have learnt who I am, and it only remains for me to conduct myself suitably to my situation. I am no longer surprised at the distinctions which have been made between my sisters and me; I am sensible of their justice, and I subscribe to it; but still I am your child; you have carried me in your bosom, and I hope you will never forget that endearing circumstance.—May I perish, added she with emotion, if I have not acknowledged

knownedged you as much as it was in my power !—Alas, Madam, said I, bestow upon me your kindness, give me your countenance, restore me the tenderness of him who thinks himself my father.---He is almost as certain of your birth, replied she, as you and I. I never see you beside him without enduring his reproaches ; he directs them against me by the severity with which he treats you : do not expect from him the sentiments of a tender father. And, may I acknowledge it to you ? you remind me of a treachery, an ingratitude, so odious on the part of another, that the idea of him is insupportable. This man constantly steps in between you and me, he repels me, and the hatred I owe to him lights upon you.—What ? said I, must I not hope that you and M. Simonin will treat me even as a stranger, as one unknown, whom huma-

nity might have induced you to shelter? —Neither of us can do it. Do not any longer, my daughter, poison the enjoyment of my life. If you had no sisters, I know what I should do; but you have two, and they have numerous families. The passion by which I was long supported is extinguished, conscience has resumed its right.... But he, to whom I owe my life.... he is no more, he is dead without remembering you, and that is the least of his crimes..... Here her figure changed; her eyes flamed, indignation overspread her countenance; she attempted to speak, but she could not articulate, the trembling of her lips would not permit her. She was seated; she leaned her head upon her hands, to conceal from me the violent emotions that passed within her breast. She remained some time in this situation. She then rose; she took two or three turns through the
room

room without saying a word ; she would have wept, but her tears refused to flow, and she said : Monster ! it was not his fault that you were not smothered in my womb, by the sufferings he cost me ; but God has preserved us both, that the mother might expiate her error in the person of the child. My daughter you have nothing, and you ever will have nothing. The little I can do for you I conceal from your sisters ; such are the consequences of a weakness. Yet I hope to have nothing with which to reproach myself at my death ; I shall have gained your dowry by my economy. I do not abuse the goodness of my husband, but every day I set apart what I occasionally receive from his liberality. I have sold all the jewels I possessed, and he has allowed me to dispose of the produce as I think proper. I loved

play, I now play no more. I was fond of spectacles, I have deprived myself of this pleasure. I was fond of company, I live retired. I loved splendour, and that too I have renounced. If you take the vows according to my wish, and that of M. Simonin, your dowry will be the fruit of my daily retrenchments.—But, Madam, said I, this house is still visited by men of property; perhaps there may be found among them, one who, satisfied with my person, will not require the savings which you have destined for my settlement.—You must think of that no more; the attention you excited has undone you.—Is the evil without remedy?—Without remedy.—But if I do not find a husband, is it necessary that I should shut myself up in a convent?—Unless you wish to perpetuate my sorrow and my remorse till my eyes are closed. To this point

must I come : your sisters will be round my bed at that terrible moment : think, if I was to see you among them, what would be the effect of your presence in these last moments ! My daughter, for such you are in spite of me, your sisters have obtained from the laws a name which you only derive from guilt ; do not torment a dying mother ; allow her to sink peaceably into the tomb ; let her be able to say to herself when she is about to appear before the great Judge, that she has repaired her fault as far as she could ; allow her to flatter herself, that after her death you will not introduce trouble into the family, and that you will not attempt to vindicate rights which you do not possess. — Mamma, said I, be easy upon that head ; send for a lawyer, let him draw up an instrument of renunciation, and I will subscribe whatever

you please.—That is impossible ; children cannot disinherit themselves ; this is the chastisement of a father and mother justly incensed. If it should please God to summon me hence to-morrow, to-morrow should I be compelled, in that extremity, to open myself to my husband, in order to take in concert the same measures. Do not expose me to an indiscretion which would render me odious in his eyes, and which would involve consequences by which you would be dishonoured. If you survive me, you will remain without a name, without fortune, and without consideration ; unfortunate wretch, tell me what is to become of you ! what ideas do you wish me to carry with me at my death ? I must then tell your father..... What am I to tell him ? That you are not his child !.... My daughter, could I, by falling at your feet, prevail upon
4 you

you.... but you have no feeling, you have the inflexible soul of your father...
... At this moment M. Simonin entered ; he perceived the disorder of my mother ; he was fond of her ; he was passionate ; he stopped short, and darting a fierce glance at me, he said, Be gone. Had he been my father, I would not have obeyed him, but he was not. He added, addressing himself to the domestic who lighted me, Tell her never again to appear.

I shut myself up in my little prison. I mused upon what my mother had told me. I dropped down upon my knees ; I prayed to God to instruct me ; I prayed long ; I remained with my face fixed to the ground. We seldom invoke the voice of heaven, but when we are in a state of doubt, and it almost always advises us to obey. This was the alternative I embraced.

My

My parents wish me to become a nun ; perhaps too it is the will of God ; alas ! I will be one ; since I am to be wretched, of what importance is it where I am !.... I entreated the girl who waited on me, to inform me when my father went out. Next day I asked my mother's permission to see her ; she answered, that she promised M. Simonin that she would not, but that I might write to her with a crayon which was given me. I wrote then upon a piece of paper [that fatal paper has been recovered, and it has been employed against me but too successfully] : “ Mamma, I am sorry for
“ all the vexations I have occasioned
“ you ; I ask your pardon ; I propose
“ to put an end to them. Dispose of me
“ as you please ; if it is your will that I
“ should take the vows, I hope also it is
“ the will of God...” The servant took this note, and carried it to my mother.
She

She came up stairs again a moment after, and said to me with transport : Mademoiselle, since but a single word was necessary to make your father, your mother, and yourself happy, why did you require to be entreated so long ? My master and mistress look so as I have never seen them since I came here : they quarrelled continually about you ; thank God, I shall see it no more... While she spoke to me, I thought I had signed my death-warrant ; and this presentiment, Sir, will be fulfilled if you abandon me. Some days elapsed without my hearing any thing ; but one morning, about nine o'clock, M. Simonin abruptly opened my door, and entered in his night-gown and night-cap. Since I had known that he was not my father, his presence only inspired me with terror. I rose and paid him my respects. It seemed to me as if I had

two

two hearts. I could not think of my mother without emotion, without feeling an inclination to shed tears; it was not so with regard to M. Simonin. It is certain that a father inspires a kind of sentiment which we feel for nobody in the world but him; this cannot be understood but by those who have found themselves, like me, in the presence of a man who had long sustained, and who had just lost that august character. Others will ever remain ignorant of it. If I passed from his presence into that of my mother, I seemed to be another person. He said to me : Suzan, do you acknowledge that billet ? Yes, Sir.—Did you write it freely ?—I cannot say that I did.—Are you at least resolved to execute what it promises ?—I am.—Have you no predilection for any particular convent ?—No : they are indifferent to me.—It is enough.

Such

Such were my answers, but unfortunately they were not written. For a whole fortnight I heard nothing upon the subject, and I supposed that they had applied to different religious houses, and that the scandal my conduct had excited, prevented my being received in the situation of a candidate. They were less scrupulous at Longchamp, doubtless because it was insinuated to them that I understood music and had a good voice. The difficulties which had been encountered, and the favour I received in being admitted into this house, were greatly exaggerated; I was even prevailed upon to write to the Superior. I was not aware of the consequences of the evidence by writing which was required of me; they too were afraid it would have seemed that I might one day retract my vows. They wished to have an attestation under my
own

own hands, that they had been voluntary. Without such a motive how could this letter, which ought to have remained in the hands of the Superior, have passed in the sequel into the possession of my brothers in law? But let us quickly shut our eyes on this scene: it shews me M. Simonin in a view, under which I no longer wish to consider him;—he is no more. I was conducted to Longchamp, accompanied by my mother. I did not even ask leave to bid M. Simonin adieu; the thought of it, I confess, never occurred till I was upon the road. I was expected. I was introduced by my history, and by my talents. They said nothing to me of the one, but they were eager to ascertain whether the acquaintance they had made was of any importance. After they had talked of a variety of indifferent things (for, after what had happened,

pened,

pened, you may well imagine they they neither spoke to me of God, nor of my call, nor of the dangers of the world, nor of the calmness of the religious life; and that they did not venture to utter a single word of that pious common-place talk in which these first moments are generally employed), the Superior said: Mademoiselle, you understand music; you sing; we have a harpsichord; if you please, we will go to the parlour..... My soul was wrung with agony; but this was not the time to display reluctance: my mother went first, I followed, and the Superior closed the train, with some nuns whom curiosity had attracted. It was night. They brought me candles. I sat down at the harpsichord. I made a great many flourishes, while I endeavoured to recollect a piece of music, of which I had plenty, and yet I could
not

not hit upon one; the Superior, however, pressed me; and without any artifice, by mere habit, because the piece was familiar to me, I sung: *Sad array, flambeaux pale, day more dismal than the night, &c.* I don't know what effect this produced, but they did not listen to me long; I was interrupted by praises, which I was a good deal surprised to have merited so soon, and at so little expence. My mother consigned me to the care of the Superior; gave me her hand to kiss, and departed.

I was now in another house, a nun, and a candidate for admission, and with every appearance of soliciting this admission from the unbiassed inclination of my own will. But you, Sir, who are acquainted with every thing that passed up to this moment, what do you think of the subject? Most of these things

things were not alledged when I wished to retract my vows ; some of them, because they were truths destitute of proof, others, because they would have rendered me odious without serving my cause. I should only have been considered as an unnatural child who sullied the memory of my parents to obtain my liberty. They were in possession of the proof of what was *against* me ; what was *for* me could neither be brought forward nor proved. I was unwilling even that the suspicion of my birth should be insinuated to the judges. My counsel wished to summon in evidence my mother's director and mine ; but from the same motives, much less would I permit this to be done. But, by the way, lest I should forget, and lest the desire of serving me should prevent you from making the reflection, under the correction of

your better judgment, I believe that it would be wiser to say nothing of my skill in music, and my playing upon the harpsichord. Nothing more would be required to betray my condition. The ostentation of these talents does not consist with the obscurity and the repose which I seek. Those in my situation do not possess them, and it is proper that I too should seem ignorant. If I am constrained to exile myself from my country, they will prove a resource to me. Exile myself from my country! Tell me why I revolt from the idea? It is because I know not where to go; because I am young, and destitute of experience; because I dread mankind and vice; because I have always lived recluse, and that if I were out of Paris, I should consider myself lost in the world. All this, perhaps, is not true, but such are my feelings. That I should

I should not know where to go, or whither to turn me, depends only, Sir, upon you.

The Superiors at Longchamp, as well as in most religious houses, change every three years. It was a Madame Moni who entered upon the charge when I was conducted to the house ; it is impossible for me to speak too highly of her ; yet her goodness proved my ruin. She was a woman of sense, and acquainted with the human heart. She could make allowances, though nobody had less occasion for it, for we all were her children. She never saw faults but those of which she could not help taking notice, or the importance of which could not be overlooked. I speak of her without interest. I discharged my duty with exactness, and she did me the justice to say, that I committed no fault which she had to punish, or which she had to pardon.

don. If she had any predilections, they were inspired by merit. After this I don't know if I ought to tell you that she loved me tenderly, and that I was not the least of her favourites. I know that is a high panegyric I bestow upon myself, greater than you can imagine, since you never knew her. The name of favourite is that which the rest invidiously bestow upon those who are best beloved by the Superior. If there was any defect with which I could reproach Madame Moni, it was that her taste for virtue, piety, candour, gentleness, talents, honour, induced her to give a marked preference to those who possessed them; and that she knew well that those who could not pretend to these qualities, were but the more humbled by her conduct. She likewise possessed the faculty, perhaps more frequent in convents than in the world, of a prompt

prompt discernment of minds. It rarely happened that a nun who did not please her at first, ever proved agreeable to her afterwards. She quickly took me into her favour, and from the very beginning I reposed the most perfect confidence in her: ill-fated those from whom she could not extract it without effort! they must have been bad without resource, and conscious of their misfortune. She talked to me of my adventure at St. Mary's. I related it to her with as little disguise as to you; I told her every thing I have now written; both what regarded my birth, and what concerned my sufferings; nothing was forgotten. She lamented my fate, she comforted me, and painted more agreeable prospects to my hopes. Meanwhile, the period of my postulation elapsed, that of my assuming the habit arrived, and I took

it. I performed my noviciate without aversion. I passed rapidly over those two years, because they contained nothing melancholy to me, but the secret feeling that I was slowly approaching a state for which I was not formed. Sometimes it was renewed with violence, and as often as this happened I recurred to my good Superior, who embraced me, who unbosomed my soul, who displayed to me her arguments with force, and always concluded with telling me : And have not other situations too their crosses ? We are apt to be sensible only of our own. Come, my child, let us fall on our knees and pray. She then knelt down and prayed aloud, but with so much unction, eloquence, mildness, elevation, and force, that you would have said that she was inspired by the Spirit of God. Her thoughts, her expressions, her images, penetrated

to the very bottom of the heart ; at first you listened ; by degrees you were elevated, you were united with her ; the soul was thrilled, and you partook her transports. Her design was not to seduce, but certainly this she accomplished. We left her with a heart enraptured, our countenances displayed joy and extasy, we shed tears so delightful ! It was an impression which she herself took, which she long retained, and which those to whom it was communicated likewise preserved. It is not to my own experience that I refer, it is to that of all the nuns. Some of them have told me that they have felt the want of her consolation as that of an exquisite pleasure ; and I believe I required only a little more habit to reach that point. Nevertheless, at the approach of my profession, I experienced a melancholy so profound, that it exposed my good Superior to severe trials. Her talents forsook her ; she herself

acknowledged it to me. I don't know, said she, what passes within me; it seems when you come as if God retired, and his spirit were silent. It is in vain that I animate myself, that I seek ideas, that I attempt to exalt my soul; I feel myself an ordinary and humble woman. I am afraid to speak. . . Ah! my dear mother, said I, what presentiment! if it were God that rendered you dumb!... One day, that I felt myself more uncertain and more depressed than ever, I went to her cell; my presence at first rendered her speechless; it seemed that she read in my eyes, in my whole person, that the profound sentiment I carried within me, was beyond her strength, and she was unwilling to struggle without the certainty of being victorious. Nevertheless, she made the attempt; by degrees she warmed; in proportion as my sorrow subsided, her enthusiasm increased. She threw herself suddenly
4 upon

upon her knees, I followed her example. I imagined that I was to partake her transports ; I wished it. She pronounced some words, then all at once she was silent ; I waited in vain, she spoke no more ; she rose, she burst into tears, she took me by the hand, and squeezing it between hers :—Oh ! my dear child, said she, what a cruel effect have you produced upon me ! Observe the consequence ; the spirit has withdrawn, I feel it ; go, let God speak to you himself, since it is not his pleasure to communicate himself by me. . . In reality, I know not what had passed within her ; whether I had inspired her with a distrust of her powers, which has never been dissipated, whether I had rendered her timid, or really broken her correspondence with heaven, but the talent of consolation returned to her no more. Upon the eve of my profession

sion I went to see her; she laboured under a melancholy equal to my own. I wept, and so did she; I threw myself at her feet, she blessed me, she raised me up, embraced me, and again sent me away, saying:—I am weary of life, I wish to die; I have asked of God never to see this day, but it is not his will. Go, I will speak to your mother, I will pass the night in prayer; pray also, but go to bed, I command you.... Allow me, answered I, to join you.... I allow you from nine o'clock till eleven, no more, no more. At half past nine o'clock I will begin to pray, and you will begin also; but at eleven o'clock, you will allow me to pray alone, and you will take repose. Go, dear child, I shall watch before God the remainder of the night.

She wished to pray, but could not. I slept, and in the mean time this holy
woman

woman went through the passages, knocking at every door ; she awoke the nuns, and made them go down without noise to the church. All of them repaired thither ; and when they were there, she invited them to address themselves to heaven in my favour. This prayer was made in silence ; then she extinguished the light, all repeated together the *Miserere*, except the Superior, who, prostrate at the foot of the altar, macerated herself in a cruel manner, saying : O God ! If it is for any fault which I have committed that you have departed from me, grant me forgiveness. I do not ask you to restore me the gift of which you have deprived me, but that you would address yourself to this innocent, who sleeps while I here invoke you in her favour. My God, speak to her, speak to her parents, and forgive me.

The

The next day, early in the morning she entered my cell ; I did not hear her, I was not yet awake. She sat down by my bedside. She had laid one of her hands gently upon my forehead. She gazed upon me ; disquietude, agitation, and sorrow, succeeded upon her countenance ; and such was the appearance she exhibited to me when I opened my eyes. She did not mention to me what had passed during the night ; she only asked, If I had gone to bed early ? I answered : At the hour you commanded me.—If I had rested ? Profoundly.—I expected so.... How I was ? Very well.—And you, my dear mother ?—Alas said she, I never saw any person take the vows without disquietude ; but I never experienced so much anxiety about any one, as about you ; I wish sincerely that you may be happy.—If you continue to love me,
I shall

I shall be happy.—Ah, did it but depend upon that!—Have you thought of nothing during the night?—No.—You have had no dream?—None.—What passes at present in your mind?—I am stupid; I yield to my fate with repugnance, and without inclination; I feel that necessity hurries me on, and I allow myself to go. Ah! my dear mother, I feel none of that mild joy, that thrilling sensation, that melancholy, that gentle perturbation, which I have sometimes remarked in those who stood in my present situation. I am weak; I cannot even weep. That it is the desire of my parents, it must be done, is the only idea which occupies me.... But you say nothing to me.—I am not come to discourse to you, but to see and to hear you. I expect your mother; endeavour not to agitate me; allow my feelings to work up in my mind; when

when it is full I will go away. I must be silent : I know myself ; I have but one impulse, and I must not waste its strength with you. Repose while my visit lasts ; say only a few words, and allow me to find here what I am come to seek. I will go, and God will perform the rest....—I was silent, I leaned upon my pillow, I held out to her one of my hands, which she took ; she seemed to meditate, and to meditate deeply ; she studiously kept her eyes shut ; sometimes she opened them, raised them to heaven, and again settled them upon me ; she was agitated, her soul was filled with tumult ; she became composed, and again her agitation returned. In truth, this woman was born to be a prophetess ; she had the countenance and the character of one. She had been beautiful ; but age, while it rendered her features heavy, and
planted

planted large wrinkles upon her face, had still added dignity to her physiognomy. She had small eyes, but they seemed either to look inwards upon herself, or to soar above the objects by which she was surrounded, and to expatiate beyond them; always into the past, or into the future. She sometimes squeezed my hand; she abruptly asked what o'clock it was?—It is near six.—Adieu, they are coming to dress you; I do not wish to be present, it would distract me... I have only care; it is to preserve moderation in the first moments.

She had scarcely gone out, when the mother of the novices and my companions came: the former stripped me of the religious habit, and dressed me in the cloaths common in the world; it is the custom, you know. I heard nothing of what was said around me: I was reduced almost to the state of an automaton; I took

no

no notice of any thing ; only I had at intervals, as it were, slight convulsive motions. They told me what it was necessary to do ; they were often obliged to repeat it to me, for I never heard the first time ; and this proceeded not from my thinking upon some other subject, but because I was absorbed ; my head was fatigued as if it had been by excessive reflection. In the mean time my Superior was conversing with my mother ; I never knew what passed at this interview, which lasted for a long time : I was told only, that when they separated, my mother was so embarrassed, that she could not find the door by which she came in ; and that the Superior went out with her hands locked and fixed against her brow.

The clock struck ; I went down. The assembly was not numerous. A sermon

sermon was preached to me: whether it designed me good or bad I know not, for I did not hear a word: they disposed of me all this morning, which is a vacuum in my life, as they pleased, for I was insensible of its lapse; I know neither what was done nor what was said. They no doubt interrogated me, I no doubt answered; I pronounced some vows, but I have no recollection of them, and I became a nun as innocently as I was made a christian: I no more comprehended the ceremony of my profession, than that of my baptism, with this difference, that the one confers grace, and the other supposes it. Well, Sir, though I did not remonstrate at Longchamp, as I did at Saint Mary's, do you think me the more bound on that account? I appeal to your judgement, I appeal to the judgement of God. I was in a state of such

profound melancholy, that some days after, when they announced to me that I belonged to the choir, I did not know what they meant. I asked if it was really true that I had made profession? I wished to see the signature of my vows. Not contented with these proofs, I made them bring the attestations of the whole community, and that of some strangers whom they had invited to the ceremony. Addressing myself several times to the Superior, I said to her : Is this then really the case ? I expected always that she was going to answer : No, my child, they deceive you. Her repeated assurances could not convince me ; I could not believe that in the space of a whole day, so bustling, so varied, so crowded with singular and striking circumstances, I could not remember one, not even the countenance, of those who attended me, nor
that

that of either the minister who preached, or of him who received my vows. The changing of my religious dress for that of the world; is the only thing which I recollect; from that moment I was what they call physically insensible. It was some months before I recovered from this state; and it is to this protracted kind of convalescence, that I ascribe my profound forgetfulness of what is past; like those who, in the course of a tedious illness, have talked sensibly, and received the sacrament; and who, after they are restored to health, have no memory of the circumstances. I have seen many instances of it in our house, and I have said to myself, this is probably what happened to me on the day that I made profession. But it remains to be enquired, whether these actions are performed by the person, and whether the person be really there, though she appear to be so.

In the course of the same year I suffered three afflicting losses : that of my father, or rather of him who passed as such ; he was old, he had laboured hard, he was worn out ; that of my Superior ; and that of my mother.

This worthy nun long felt her hour approaching ; she condemned herself to silence ; she ordered her coffin to be brought into her chamber. She had lost the power of sleeping ; she had passed her days and nights in writing and in meditation ; she has left fifteen meditations, which I think are most beautiful ; I have a copy of them. If you are curious any day to see the ideas which this event suggests, I shall send you them : they are entitled, *The last Moments of Sister Moni.*

At the approach of death, she made herself be dressed ; she was laid upon a bed ; they administered to her the
last

the last sacrament ; she held a Christ in her arms. It was night ; the light of the tapers illuminated the mournful scene ; we were around her, we shed tears ; her cell resounded with cries, all on a sudden her eyes sparkled ; she raised herself up hastily, and spoke ; her voice was almost as strong as it was when she was in health ; she reproached us with our tears, which seemed to envy her eternal felicity. My children, your grief is mistimed. It is there, it is there, said she, pointing to the heavens, that I shall be of service to you ; my eyes shall rest perpetually upon this house ; I will intercede for you, and I shall be heard. Come near, all of you, that I may embrace you ; come, and receive my blessing and last adieus. When she was uttering these last words, this singular woman, who has left behind her never-ending regrets, departed.

My mother died, on her return from a visit which she made to one of her daughters, at the end of autumn. She was splenetic; her health was very much impaired. I never knew either my father's name, or the history of my birth. The person who was both her and my director, sent me from her a small packet containing fifty louis, with a note wrapped up in a small piece of linen. The note was as follows: "My
" child, it is a trifle, but my conscience
" does not permit me to dispose of a
" greater sum; it is the fruits of my
" savings upon the small presents made
" me by M. Simonin. Lead a holy
" life; it will conduce most to your
" happiness, even in this world. Pray
" for me: the crime to which you owe
" your birth, is the only one of impor-
" tance which I have committed; aid
" me in expiating it; and may God
" forgive

“ forgive me for bringing you into the
“ world, in consideration of the good
“ works you may perform. Above all,
“ be not troublesome to the family ;
“ and though the choice of the condi-
“ tion which you have embraced, is not
“ so voluntary as I could have wished,
“ dread the idea of changing it. Would
“ that I had been shut up in a convent
“ for my whole life ! I should not be so
“ distressed with the thought of hearing
“ in a short time my irrevocable doom.
“ Consider, my child, that the fate of
“ your mother in another world, de-
“ pends much upon the conduct which
“ you hold in this ; the omniscient
“ God will apply to me in his justice
“ all the good and all the evil which
“ which you shall perform. Adieu,
“ Susan ; ask nothing of your sisters,
“ they are not in a situation to assist
“ you ; expect nothing from your fa-
“ ther,

“ther, he has gone before me ; he has
“seen the great day ; he waits my
“coming ; my presence will be less
“terrible to him than his will be to me.
“Adieu, once more. Ah ! wretched
“mother ! Ah ! wretched child ! your
“sisters are arrived ; I am not pleased
“with them ; they seize, they carry off
“my property, they quarrel under the
“eyes of a dying mother, from motives
“of interest ; a circumstance which is to
“me the most distressing. When
“they approach my bed, I turn to the
“other side ; what do I see in them ?
“two creatures, in whom indigence has
“stifled every natural feeling. They
“sigh after the little that I am about to
“leave ; they put indecent questions
“to the physician and nurse, which
“mark the impatience with which they
“expect the moment when I shall go
“hence, and which will put them in
“possession

“ possession of every thing about me.
“ They are suspicious, I know not
“ why, lest I should have some money
“ concealed about the mattrass : there
“ is no pretence which they have not
“ employed to make me rise, and they
“ have succeeded ; but luckily the
“ person with whom I was to make the
“ deposit, came last night, and I have
“ sent you the small packet with this
“ letter, which he has written to my
“ dictation. Burn the letter ; and when
“ you know that I am no more, which
“ will speedily happen, you will say
“ mass for me, and you will renew your
“ vows, for I still desire that you re-
“ main in the convent : the idea of your
“ being cast friendless, destitute, and
“ young upon the world, would render
“ my last moments completely mise-
“ rable.”

My

My father died on the 5th of January, my Superior at the end of the same month, and my mother on the second Christmas holiday.

Sister Saint - Christian succeeded Mother Moni. But, ah ! Sir, what a difference between the one and the other ! I have told you what a woman the former was. The latter had an insignificant character ; her mind was narrow and superstitious ; she gave into new opinions ; she conferred with Sulpicians and Jesuits. She took an aversion to all her predecessors favourites :—the house instantly became a scene of disturbance, animosities, slanders, accusations, calumnies, and persecutions : we had to discuss theological questions which we did not understand, to subscribe formulas, and to conform to singular practices. Mother Moni did
not

not approve of those penitential exercises which concerned the body; she macerated herself only twice in the course of her life, once on the eve of my profession, and another time on a similar occasion. She used to say of these penances, that they corrected no fault, that they only served as a ground of pride. Her desire was that her nuns should behave well, and that they should keep their bodies sound, and their minds tranquil. The first thing she did when she entered upon her charge, was to make them bring her all the hair cloths, and the scourges; and to forbid them to spoil their food with ashes, to lie on hard beds, or to provide themselves with any of these instruments. The second, on the contrary, sent back to every nun her hair-cloth and her scourge, and took from them the Old and New Testament.

tament. The favourites of the former were not the favourites of the succeeding reign... The existing Superior was indifferent to me, to say no worse, because I had been beloved by her predecessor; but I was not long of embittering my lot, by some actions which you will call either imprudent or spirited, according to the light in which you view them. In the first place, I wholly abandoned myself to the grief which I felt for the loss of our former Superior, praised her upon all occasions, and suggested comparisons between her and the present governess, which were not favourable to the latter; described the state of the house for years past, recalled to their recollection the peace we enjoyed, the indulgence we experienced, and the nourishment, both spiritual and temporal, which was then administered to us; every thing, in fine, which

which tended to exalt the morals, the feelings, and the character of Sister Moni. Secondly, I cast my hair-cloth into the fire, threw away my scourge, preached to my friends upon the subject, and engaged some of them to follow my example. The third thing I did, was to provide myself with an Old and New Testament ; the fourth, to renounce all parties, and to abide by the name of Christian, without accepting the title of Jansenist, or Molinist. The fifth was, strictly to regulate my conduct by the rules of the house, without either wishing to do more or less than they required, and consequently not to perform any work of supererogation, those of obligation, appearing to me to be more than sufficient ; not to mount to the organ except on holidays ; not to sing except when I was of the choir ; and no longer to suffer them to abuse

abuse my complaisance and my talents, by setting me to do every thing at all times. I read their constitution over and over again, I learnt it by heart: if they ordered me to do any thing which was either not clearly expressed, or which was omitted, or which appeared to me to be contrary to what was there enjoined, I would firmly refuse to comply, I would take the book and say: These are the engagements that I have taken, and I have taken no others..... My discourses made some converts. The authority of the mistresses was limited, they could no longer dispose of us like slaves. Not a day passed without some scene of notoriety. In cases of uncertainty, my companions came to consult me, and I always took part against despotism. I had soon the air of a factious person, and perhaps I acted the part of one.

The

The Grand Vicars of the Archbishop were continually called in. I appeared; I defended myself, I defended my companions; and it never once happened that they were condemned, such care did I take to have reason on my side. It was impossible to attack me on the score of discharging my duty: that I scrupulously performed. As for those little favours which a Superior is always at liberty to grant or to withhold, I never asked them. I did not appear in the parlour; and with regard to visits, not knowing any person, I never received any. But I had burnt my hair-cloth, and my scourge; I had advised others to do the same; I never wished to hear either good or ill spoken of Jansenism or Molinism. When they asked me if I acknowledged submission to the constitution, I replied, that I did to the church; and, if I received

the Bull? that I received the gospel. They visited my cell, they found the Old and New Testament in it. I had let escape some imprudent expressions about a suspicious intimacy of some of the favourites; the Superior had long and frequent interviews with a young ecclesiastic, the reason of which I had distinguished from the pretext: I omitted nothing which could make myself feared, hated, and undone; and I accomplished it at last. They no longer complained of me to the Superiors, but they did every thing in their power to render my life uncomfortable. They forbid the nuns to come near me, and I soon found myself deserted. I had a few friends who contrived, by stealth, to get the better of the restraint which was imposed upon them; and now that they could not pass the day with me, they visited me
at

at night, or at forbidden hours ; they set spies upon us ; they surprised me sometimes with one, sometimes with another ; this sort of imprudence was all they wished for, and I was punished for it in a most inhuman manner : they condemned me for whole weeks to pass the service upon my knees, apart from the rest of the choir ; to live upon bread and water ; to remain shut up in my cell ; to perform the meanest offices in the house. Those whom they called my accomplices were no better treated. When they could not find me in a fault, they took one for granted : they sometimes gave me orders which it was impossible to execute, and punished me for not obeying them ; they changed the hours of service and of eating ; they deranged, without my knowledge, the whole cloistral order ; and with all the attention I could be-

stow, I was every day culpable, and every day punished. I had courage, but there is no degree of fortitude that can support desertion, solitude, and persecution. Things came to such a height, that they made sport of tormenting me; it was the amusement of a band of fifty persons. It is impossible to enter into a minute detail of their malicious tricks; they prevented me from sleeping, from watching, and from praying. One day they stole some of my clothes, another day they carried off my keys, or my breviary; my lock was spoiled; they hindered me from doing my duty, and what I did they never failed to derange; they ascribed to me actions and speeches of which I was not the author; they made me responsible for every thing, and my life was one continued scene of real or pretended faults and of chastisements.—My
health

health was not proof against so long and severe trials ; I fell into a state of dejection, spleen, and melancholy. At first I had recourse to the altar for energy of mind, and I found some at times. I wavered between resignation and despair, sometimes submitting to all the rigour of my fate, at other times meditating my deliverance by violent means. There was a deep well at the foot of the garden ; how often have I looked at it ! There was by the side of the well a stone seat ; how often have I sat upon, it with my head leaning upon the brink ! how often, in the tumult of my ideas, have I suddenly got up and resolved to put an end to my sufferings ! What prevented me ? Why did I then prefer lamentation, crying aloud, trampling my veil under my feet, tearing my hair, and macerating my face with my nails ?—If God prevented me from de-

stroying myself, why did he not also put a stop to these acts of violence?—I am going to tell you a thing, which will, perhaps, appear strange, but which is not the less true; it is, that I have no doubt but my frequent visits to the well were observed, and that my cruel enemies flattered themselves that I would one day execute the purpose which was conceived in the bottom of my breast. When I went that way, they affected to part from me, and to look in a different direction. I have several times found the garden door open when it ought to have been shut, particularly on those days when they had multiplied the causes of my chagrin, and when they had roused the violence of my temper to such a pitch, that they thought my intellects were deranged. But as soon as I discovered that they presented this form of death to my
despair,

despair, that they led me, as it were, by the hand to this well, and that I found it always ready to receive me, it ceased to employ my thoughts ; my mind turned to other objects ; I went through the galleries, and measured the height of the windows ; at night, when I was undressing myself, I tried, without thinking of it, the strength of my garters : another day I would not eat ; I went down to the hall, and remained there leaning against the wall, my hands hanging down by my sides, and my eyes shut ; I would not touch the meat they set before me ; and in this state I so completely forgot myself, that I would stay after all the nuns had gone out. They affected to withdraw without making a noise ; and leaving me there, they afterwards punished me for neglecting the exercises. What shall I tell you ? They disgusted me with

almost all the means of ridding myself of my existence, because, far from opposing my intentions, they put the instruments of executing them in my way. We do not like the appearance of people pushing us out of the world ; and perhaps, had they seemed eager to keep me in it, I should have been no more. When we take away our life, it is perhaps for the purpose of occasioning distress to others ; and we preserve it, when we think that they would be pleased at our taking it away : these are the secret workings of our minds. In truth, if it is possible for me to recollect what passed within me by the side of the well, I think I called upon those wretches who kept at a distance for the sake of favouring the commission of a crime : Take one step towards me, shew the smallest desire of saving me, run to prevent me, and
be

be assured you shall be too late.....In fact, I lived only because they wished my death. The savage passion for tormenting and destroying decays in the world; it is indefatigable in the cloister.

I was in this situation when, reviewing my past life, I conceived the design of renouncing my vows. At first I thought of it slightly. Alone, deserted, without support, how could I succeed in a project so difficult, though seconded by all the assistance of which I was in want? Yet this idea tranquilized me, my spirit settled, I was more myself; I avoided some evils, and I supported more patiently those by which I was assailed. This change was remarked, and it excited astonishment; malice stopped short, like a cowardly foe who pursues, and against whom you make a stand when he does not expect

it. There is one question, Sir, which I would wish to propose to you ; it is, why, in spite of all the gloomy ideas which pass through the mind of a nun reduced to despair, that of setting fire to the house never occurs to her imagination ? I never entertained the design, nor did some others, although the thing be very easy to execute. Nothing more is necessary than, upon a windy day, to apply a flambeau to a garret, a pile of wood, a passage. No convents are set fire to ; yet upon such occasions the doors are thrown open, and they save themselves who can. May not the reason be, that they fear the danger that might overtake themselves and those they love, and that they disdain a relief which is common to them with those they hate ? This last idea is, perhaps, too subtle to be true.

From

From occupying ourselves greatly with any object, we feel its justice, and even believe its possibility; we are very strong when we have reached that point. It was to me the business of a fortnight; my mind is rapid in its movement. What was the object? To draw up a memorial and to present it for a consultation; both were attended with danger.—Since this resolution had taken place in my mind, I was observed with greater attention than ever; they followed me with their eyes; I never took a step that was not traced; I never uttered a word that was not weighed. They insinuated themselves about me, they endeavoured to sound me, they questioned me, they affected compassion and friendship, they reviewed my past life, they faintly blamed me, they devised excuses, they hoped a more correct conduct, they flattered me
that

that the future would be more serene ; at the same time they entered my cell every moment, by day, by night, upon some pretext or other ; abruptly and cautiously they drew aside my curtains and retired. I had contracted the habit of going to bed in my clothes. I had another practice, that of reducing my confession to writing. Upon the appointed days I asked for ink and paper from the Superior, who never refused me. I waited therefore for the day of confession, and in the mean time I arranged in my head what I had to propose. It was an abridgement of all I have written to you, only I explained myself under feigned names. But I committed three absurdities : the first was, telling the Superior that I should have a great many things to write, and upon this pretext, asking of her more paper than is allowed ; the second, occupying myself with my memorial

morial, and neglecting my confession; and the third, having made out no confession, and being unprepared for this act of religion, remaining at the confessional but a single moment. All this was remarked, and they concluded that the paper I had asked for was employed in a different manner from that I had mentioned. But if it had not served for my confession, as was evident, how had it been used? Without knowing that they were impressed with these disquietudes, I felt that it would not do for them to find upon me a writing of this importance. At first I thought of sewing it in my bolster, and in my mattress; then of concealing it in my clothes, of burying it in the garden, of throwing it in the fire. You cannot believe how strongly I was urged to write, and how much I was embarrassed with it when it was written. First, I sealed

the paper, thrust it into my bosom, and went to service, to which the bell summoned. I was oppressed with an alarm which my emotions betrayed. I was seated by the side of a young nun who loved me; sometimes I had seen her gaze upon me with pity, and shed tears. She did not speak to me, but certainly she was unhappy. At the risk of every consequence, I resolved to entrust her with my paper. At the moment of the prayer, when all the nuns fall upon their knees, bend forward, and are, as it were, sunk in their pews, I gently drew the paper from my bosom, and held it out to her behind me; she took it and thrust it into her bosom. This was the most important service she had done me; but I had received many others; she had laboured whole months, without being discovered, in removing the little obstacles with which they had encumbered

encumbered my duties, and, upon my failure, to have an opportunity to chastise me. She came and knocked at my door when it was time to go out; she put to rights every thing they had deranged; she had gone and rung the bell, or made responses upon the proper occasions; she was in every place where I ought to have been. Of all this I was ignorant.

I did well in employing this expedient. When we left the choir, the Superior said to me:—Sister Susan, follow me....I followed her; then stopping in the passage at another door, This is your cell, said she, Sister St. Jerome will occupy yours.... I entered, and she along with me; we had both sat down without speaking, when a nun appeared with some clothes which she laid upon a chair, and the Superior said:—Sister Susan, undress, and take these clothes.... I obeyed in her presence;

sence; in the mean time she was attentive to all my motions. The sister who had brought the clothes was at the door; she re-entered, carried away those I had quitted; and went out, followed by the Superior. I was not informed of the reason of these proceedings, nor did I enquire. During this interval, they had searched every part of my cell, they had unsewed my pillow and my mattress, they had displaced and rummaged every thing. They traced my footsteps; they went to the confessional, to the church, to the garden, to the well, to the low seat; I saw part of these searches, and I suspected the rest. They found nothing, but they remained as fully convinced as ever, that there was some foundation for their anxiety. They continued to watch me with spies for many days. They went wherever
I had

I had gone ; they looked every where, but in vain. At last the Superior believed that it was impossible to know the truth, but from myself. She one day entered my cell, and said to me, Sister Susan, you have faults, but that of lying is not among the number ; then tell me the truth : What have you done with all the paper I gave you ?—Madam, I have told you.—That is impossible, for you asked me for a great deal, and you were only a moment at the confessional.—It is true.—What then have you done with it ? — What I told you.—Well then, swear to me, by the holy obedience you have vowed to God, that such is the truth, and, in spite of appearances, I will believe you.—Madam, you are not permitted to exact an oath for a slight matter, and I am not at liberty to take it. I cannot swear.—You deceive me, Sister Susan,
and

and you are not aware to what you expose yourself. What have you done with the paper I gave you?—I have told you.—Where is it?—I have it not.—What use have you made of it?—Such as is made of those writings which are useless after they have served their purpose.—Swear to me, by the sacred obedience you owe, that it has all been employed in writing your confession, and is no longer in your possession.—Madam, I repeat, this second point being no more important than the first, I cannot swear.—Swear, said she to me, or. . . . —I will not swear.—You will not swear?—No, Madam.—You are then guilty?—And of what am I guilty?—Of every thing; there is nothing of which you are not capable. You have affected to praise my predecessor, in order to depreciate me; to condemn the customs she had proscribed, which she
had

had abolished, and which I conceived it my duty to re-establish; you have endeavoured to destroy the principles of subordination in the community; you have infringed its laws, you have sown division among its members; you have failed in the performance of every duty which your situation required; and what to me is of all the most painful consideration, you have compelled me to punish you and those whom you had seduced. While it was in my power to enforce against you every severity which the most rigorous measures could inflict, I yet treated you with indulgence; I imagined that you would acknowledge your faults, that you would resume the spirit which befits your situation, and that you would solicit with anxiety your reconciliation with me; but I have been mistaken. Something is in agitation in your mind,

which is not good; you are occupied with some projects; the interest of the house demands that I should know, and I will know them, depend upon it. Sister Susan, tell me the truth.—I have told it you.—I am about to leave you; dread my return; I will again sit down; I allow you yet a moment to determine. Your papers, if they exist. . . — I have them not.—Or the oath that they only contained your confession.— I cannot do it. . . . — She remained a moment in silence, then she retired, and returned with four of her favourites. The appearance of them all was distracted and furious. I threw myself at their feet, I implored their mercy. They all exclaimed in concert, No mercy. Madam, do not allow yourself to be moved by her supplications; she must give up her papers, or go quietly. I embraced the knees first of one, then of another,

another; I addressed them by their names, saying: Sister Saint Agnes, Sister Saint Julia, what have I done to you? Why do you incense my Superior against me? Was it thus that I ever acted? How often have I interceded for you! You then remembers my kindness no more. You were in fault, but I am not. The Superior, unmoved, looked at me and said, Give up your papers, wretch, or disclose what they contained.—Madam, said they to her, do not ask her for them any more; you are too indulgent; you are not sufficiently acquainted with her character: she is an untractable spirit with whom it is impossible to succeed but by proceeding to extremities; she compels you to embrace that alternative, and she must suffer for it. Give us orders to strip her, and let her be consigned to the place destined for those who pursue a

similar conduct.—My dear mother, I swear I have done nothing which can offend either God or man.—That is not the oath which I exact.—She may have written against us, against you, some memorial to the Grand Vicar, or to the Archbishop; God knows the description she may have given of the internal state of the house; accusation easily obtains credit. Madam, you must dispose of this creature, unless you would have our fall to be determined by her.—The Superior added: Sister Susan, consider. . . . I rose abruptly, and said to her: Madam, I have considered every consequence. I feel that I am undone, but a moment sooner or later is not worth the trouble of a thought. Do with me whatever you please, yield to their fury, consummate your injustice.—Immediately I held out my hands to them; they were seized by her companions, who

4

who tore away my veil, and stripped me without shame. They found in my bosom a miniature picture of my old Superior ; they seized it : I entreated permission to kiss it once more, but the favour was refused. They threw me a shift, they took off my stockings, they covered me with a sack, and they led me, with my head and feet uncovered, along the passages. I cried, I called for help ; but they had sounded the bell, to give warning that nobody should appear. I invoked Heaven : I sunk to the earth, and they dragged me along. When I had reached the bottom of the stairs, my feet were bloody, my limbs were bruised ; my situation would have softened hearts of flint. With large keys, however, they opened the door of a little gloomy subterraneous cell, where they threw me upon a mat half rotted by the damp.

I found there a slice of black bread, and a pitcher of water, with some coarse necessary utensils. The mat, when rolled up, formed a pillow. Upon a stone lay a death's head, and a wooden crucifix. My first impulse was to put a period to my existence. I applied my hands to my throat, I tore my clothes with my teeth ; I uttered hideous cries ; I howled like a wild beast, I dashed my head against the walls ; I covered myself over with blood ; I endeavoured to take away my life till my strength failed, which very soon happened. In this place I passed three days ; I imagined myself condemned to it for life. Every morning one of my executioners visited me, and said : Obey our Superior, and you shall be liberated from this place.—I have done nothing, I know not what I am required to perform :
Ah !

Ah! Sister Saint Clement, there is a God in heaven.

The third day, about nine o'clock at night, the door was opened by the same nuns who had conducted me to the dungeon. After a panegyric upon the goodness of the Superior, they announced to me her forgiveness, and that they were going to set me at liberty.—It is too late, said I, leave me; here I wish to die.—Nevertheless they raised me up, and dragged me away; they led me back to a cell where I found the Superior. I have consulted God, said she, upon your situation; he has touched my heart; it is his will that I should take pity upon you, and I obey. Fall upon your knees, and ask his pardon.... I fell upon my knees, and said, My God, I entreat your forgiveness for the faults I have committed, as upon the cross you asked forgiveness for me.—What
I 4 presumption!

presumption! exclaimed they; she compares herself to Jesus Christ, and us she compares to the Jews by whom he was crucified.—Do not consider my conduct, said I, but consider yourselves, and judge.—This is not all, said the Superior to me; swear by the sacred obedience you have vowed, that you will not speak of what has happened.—What you have done, then, is certainly very criminal, since you exact from me an oath that I shall never reveal it. None but your own conscience shall ever know it, I swear.—You swear?—Yes, I swear. . . . This being concluded, they stripped me of the clothes they had given me, and left me again to dress myself in my own.

I had been affected by the damps, I was in a critical situation; my whole body was bruised: for some days I had only taken a few drops of water, and a
little

little bread. I imagined that this persecution was to be the last I should have to suffer. From the momentary effect of these violent shocks, which demonstrate the extraordinary power of nature in young persons, I recovered in a very short time; and when I again made my appearance, I found all the community persuaded that I had been sick. I resumed the exercises of the house, and my place at church. I had not forgotten my paper, nor the young sister to whom it had been confided: I was sure that she had not abused the deposit, and that she had not kept it without anxiety. Some days after my liberation from prison, in the choir, at the same moment when I had given it her (that is, when we fall on our knees, and when, inclined towards each other, we disappear in our seats), I felt myself pulled gently by my gown; I stretched out my hand
and

and received a billet which contained only these words : “ What terrible anxiety you have occasioned me ! and “ what am I to do with that cruel paper ? ”—After reading this, I twisted it in my hand, and swallowed it. All this happened at the beginning of Lent. The time was approaching when the curiosity of hearing the musical performances attracts to Longchamp all the good and the bad company of Paris. My voice was exceedingly fine, though now a little spoilt. In these religious houses, attention is paid to the most minute circumstances that concern their interests ; I was therefore treated with more attention and indulgence ; I enjoyed a greater portion of liberty. The sisters whom I taught to sing, were allowed to visit me. She to whom I had confided my memorial was of the number. In the hours of recreation
which

which we spent in the garden, I took her aside ; I made her sing ; and while she sung, I addressed her as follows : You have a great many acquaintances, I have none. I do not wish you to expose yourself to the danger of detection ; I should prefer dying here, rather than expose you to the suspicion of having served me. I know, my friend, that it would occasion your ruin without obtaining my deliverance ; and although your ruin could accomplish my safety, I should not accept it at such a price.... Don't speak of that, said she ; what is the service you wish to have done ? — I wish to have that memorial conveyed to some able advocate for consultation, concealing, at the same time, the house from which it comes, and to obtain an answer, which you may put into my hands at church or elsewhere.—But what have you done with my billet ?
said

said she.—Let that give you no uneasiness ; I swallowed it.—You likewise, said she, may keep your mind at ease ; I will attend to your business. You will observe, Sir, that I sung while she spoke to me, and that she sung while I replied, and that music was mingled with our conversation.

She did not fail very soon to keep her word, and she communicated to me the information in our usual manner. Holy week arrived. The concourse of spectators to our *Tenebres* was numerous. I sung so well as to excite those tumultuous and scandalous marks of approbation which are bestowed upon the comedians in your theatres, and which ought never to be heard in the temple of the Lord, especially upon those solemn and awful days devoted to celebrate the memory of the Son nailed to the cross, for the expiation

tion of the sins of the human race. My young pupils were well prepared : some of them had good voices, almost all had expression and taste ; and it seemed that the public had heard them with pleasure, and that the community was satisfied with the success of my cares.

You know, Sir, that upon Maundy Thursday the holy sacrament is transported from the tabernacle in which it is kept, to a particular altar, where it remains till Friday morning. This interval is employed in adoration by the nuns, who repair to the altar successively, two and two. There is a list, which points out to each their hour of adoration. With what pleasure did I read : Sister Saint Susan, and Sister Saint Ursula, from two o'clock in the morning to three ! I repaired to the altar at the appointed hour ; my companion was there. We placed ourselves
together

together upon the steps of the altar ; we prostrated ourselves, we worshipped God for half an hour. At the end of this period, my young friend stretched out her hand to me, and pressing mine, said : Perhaps we shall never enjoy an opportunity of conversing so long, and so freely. God knows the constraint in which we live, and he will forgive us if we share for our own concerns that time which should be wholly dedicated to his service. I have not read the memorial, but it is not difficult to guess its contents. I shall have the answer to it immediately ; but if that answer should encourage you to commence a suit to be enabled to renounce your vows, do you not observe that you must necessarily consult with gentlemen of the law ?—True—That for this purpose liberty is requisite ?—I know.—And that if you act wisely, you will avail yourself
of

of present circumstances to procure it?

—I have reflected upon that subject.—

You will do it then?—I shall consider.

—One thing more: if your business should be opened, you will remain here abandoned to all the fury of the community: have you foreseen the persecutions to which you will be exposed?—

They cannot be more severe than those I have already suffered.—I don't know

that.—Excuse me, they will not dare at first to deprive me of my liberty.—

And why not?—Because I shall be, as it were, placed between the world and the cloister. I shall possess the opportunity to speak, the liberty to complain:

I will summon you all as witnesses:

they will not venture to commit injuries

which might furnish me with subject of

complaint; they will beware of doing

any act which might render odious the

cause they maintain. Nothing would

be

be more acceptable to me, than the ill usage they might inflict ; but they will not act in this manner ; be assured, they will pursue a very different course. They will beset me with solicitations, they will represent the injury I am about to do to myself, and to the house ; and depend upon it, they will not recur to menace, but when they discover that mildness and insinuation are employed without success ; and that at all events they will forbear to put in practise any violent measures.—But it is incredible that you can have such an aversion for a situation, the duties of which you perform with so much facility and exactness.—I feel that aversion in my own breast ; it was engraved on my mind at my birth, and it never will be erased. I shall end by being a bad nun, and I must anticipate that moment. But if unfortunately you should

should prove unsuccessful ! If I should prove unsuccessful, I will request liberty to change my house. And if you do not obtain this favour, I will die.—We suffer much before we choose the alternative of death. Ah ! my friend, I shudder at the conduct you pursue ; I tremble lest your vows should be adjudged to be broken, and lest they should not. If they are, what course are you to follow ? what will you do in the world ? You have figure, wit, and talents ; but these, they say, are of little service when they are connected with virtue ; and I know that you will not swerve from the last.—You do justice to me, but not to virtue ; upon it alone I depend ; the less frequently it is to be found among mankind, the more it ought to be valued.—It is praised, but it is neglected.—It is virtue alone, however, that encourages and supports me in my design. Whatever may be

objected to me, my morals must be respected. Of me at least, it will not be said, as of many others, that I was seduced from the state to which I belonged by a criminal passion. I see nobody, I am acquainted with nobody. I demand my freedom, because the sacrifice of it was not voluntary. Did you read my memorial?—No; I opened the packet you gave me, because it was without direction, and I was induced to think it intended for me; but the first lines undeceived me, and I went no farther. How happily were you inspired with the idea of confiding it to me! a moment later it would have been found upon you.... But the hour which puts an end to our station, approaches. Let us prostrate ourselves, that those who succeed, may find us in the proper situation. Ask of God to enlighten and to guide you; I will unite my prayers and my sighs with yours....

My mind was now a little soothed. My companion prayed in an erect posture, while I prostrated myself, with my forehead leaning upon the lowest step of the altar, and my arms extended upon the upper steps. I do not believe that I ever addressed God with more consolation and fervour. My heart palpitated with violence; in an instant I forgot every thing around me. I am ignorant how long I remained in this position, or how much longer I might have continued; but doubtless I presented a very affecting spectacle to my companion, and the two nuns who arrived at the spot. When I rose, I thought myself alone, I was mistaken; all three were behind me, standing, and bathed in tears. They had not ventured to interrupt me. They waited till I should return to myself from that state of transport and effusion in which I appeared. When I

directed my looks to that side on which they stood, my countenance must doubtless have possessed a very commanding character, if I may judge from the effect which it produced upon them, by the resemblance they told me I bore at that moment to our former Superior, when she used to impart to us spiritual consolation, and by the emotions which my appearance had inspired. Had I felt any bent to hypocrisy, or fanaticism, and had been disposed to play a distinguished part in the house, I have no doubt that I should have succeeded. My soul was easily enflamed, exalted, transported ; and a thousand times our good Superior embracing me, has said, that no person would have loved God with an ardour like mine ; that I had a heart of flesh, while others had hearts of stone. Certain it is, that that I experienced an extreme facility in sharing

sharing her extasies. In the prayers which she uttered aloud, it sometimes happened that I would become the speaker, follow the train of her ideas, and catch, as it were from inspiration, a part of what she herself would have said. My companions heard her in silence, or were contented merely to follow, while I interrupted her effusions, soared into a higher flight, and joined my voice to hers in accents of adoration. I very long preserved the impression I had taken, and it seemed as if some part of it was destined to be restored; for it used to be observed of others, that they had conversed with her, while it was perceived of her, that she had conversed with me. But what signifies all this when the call no longer exists?.... The period of our station being expired, we resigned our place to those who succeeded. My young,

companion and I embraced each other very tenderly before we separated.

The scene which had taken place at the altar, excited considerable attention in the house. The success of our *Tenebres* on Good Friday likewise had its share : I sung, I played upon the organ, I was applauded. O giddy Nuns ! I had scarcely any difficulty in reconciling myself to the whole members of the community ; they met me half way, and among the first, the Superior herself. My acquaintance was desired by some people of the world, a circumstance which corresponded too well with my project, to permit me to decline their advances. I was visited by the chief President, Madame de Soubise, and a number of persons of distinction, by monks, by priests, soldiers, magistrates, by pious women, and by ladies of fashion ; and, among the rest, by
that

that kind of bucks you call *Falons Rouges*, whom I quickly dismissed. I cultivated no acquaintances but those which were unexceptionable; the rest I resigned to the nuns, who were not so nice.

I forgot to mention, that the first mark of kindness I received, was my re-establishment in my cell. I had the courage to demand the restoration of the little picture of our former Superior, and they did not venture to refuse the request. It has resumed its place at my breast, where it shall remain as long as I live. Every morning my first care is to raise my soul to God; my second is to kiss the portrait. When I am desirous to pray, and when I feel my heart cold and languid, I take it from my neck, and place it before me. I gaze upon it, and receive inspiration. It is much to be regretted,

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that

that we never were acquainted with the holy persons whose images are exposed to our veneration ; for then they would strike us with very different impressions. They would not allow us to remain at their feet, or in their presence, with those cold and lifeless feelings which we often experience.

I received the answer to my memorial from a M. Manouri, which was neither favourable nor unfavourable. Before pronouncing upon this affair, a great many explanations were required, which it was difficult to furnish without a personal interview. I then declared my name, and invited M. Manouri to come to Longchamp. These gentlemen are not easily drawn from home ; he came however. We had a very long conversation, and adjusted a plan of correspondence, by which he was to convey his questions with safety, and

and I to return my answers. On my side, I employed the whole interval during which he kept my business under consideration, in conciliating favour and kindness, in disposing people to take an interest in my fortune, and in endeavours to obtain protection. . . . I told my name, I disclosed the circumstances of my conduct in the first house in which I had lived, the hardships I had suffered in the house of my parents, the severity with which I had been treated in the convent, my remonstrance at Saint - Mary's, my stay at Longchamp, my taking the habit, my profession, with the cruelties that had been exercised against me after my vows were consummated. My tale was heard with pity and commiseration, and accompanied with offers of assistance: without farther explanation, I reserved the kindness that was expressed

in my favour, for an occasion in which it might be necessary. Nothing transpired in the house. I had obtained permission from Rome to protest against my vows ; the action was on the point of being instituted, without the remotest suspicion on the subject being entertained. You may then conceive the surprise of my Superior, when she received the intimation of a protest, in the name of Maria Susan Simonin, against her vows, with a request to be allowed to quit the religious habit, and leave the cloister, and to regulate her future life as she might think proper.

I had readily foreseen that I should experience various kinds of opposition, from the laws, from the religious house to which I belonged, and from the alarm with which my sisters and my brothers-in-law would be seized. Should I regain my freedom, their fortune might be considerably

considerably affected by the claims which it was in my power to advance. I wrote to my sisters, and entreated them to give no opposition to my leaving the convent; I appealed to their conscience to bear witness to the little freedom with which my vows had been made. I offered to renounce, by an authentic instrument, every pretension to the succession of my father and mother. I omitted no argument that could persuade them, that the step I had taken, was dictated neither by interest nor by passion. I was not sanguine in the hopes of inspiring them with sentiments favourable to my design. This instrument which I proposed to make, executed while I yet was under religious engagements, became invalid; and they had too little security that I would ratify it when I recovered my liberty. And, although they had agreed
to

to accept my proposal, in what situation would they have been placed? Would they have left their sister without fortune and without asylum? Would they, in such circumstances, have retained possession of her property? What would they have said to the world in defence of such a conduct? If she come to us to beg support, can we deny her solicitations? If she is desirous to marry, who can tell the situation of the man with whom she may form an alliance? And, if she should have children.....No. We dare not consent. We must oppose with all our might this dangerous attempt.... Such were their reflections; and such were the principles upon which their conduct was founded.

Scarcely had the Superior received my application in legal form, when she ran to my cell. How, Sister Susan! said she to me, you wish to leave us?—

Yes,

Yes, Madam.—And you are going to appeal from your vows?—Yes, Madam.—Have you not acted without constraint?—No, Madam.—And what has constrained you?—Every thing.—Your father?—My father.—Your mother?—The same.—And why did not you remonstrate at the foot of the altar?—I was so little myself, that I do not recollect even having stood by it.—How can you say so?—I speak the truth.—What! did not you hear the priest ask you : Sister, and Susan Simonin, do you promise to God, obedience, chastity, and poverty?—I have no recollection of it.—You did not answer, Yes?—I have no recollection of it.—And you imagine that people will believe this?—They may or may not believe it; but it is not the less true.—My dear child, if such pretences were listened to, what dreadful
abuses

abuses would be the consequence ! You have taken an inconsiderate step, you have suffered yourself to be misled by a revengeful feeling ; the chastisements which you have obliged me to inflict upon you, still rankle in your bosom ; you think they are sufficient to make you break your vows ; you are wrong : it is an excuse which cannot be sustained either by God or man. Consider, that perjury is the greatest of all crimes ; that you have already committed it in your heart, and that you are about to consummate it.—I shall not be perjured, I have never been sworn.—If you have suffered some injuries, have they not been repaired ?—It is not upon these injuries that I ground my determination.—What is it then ?—Upon the want of a call, upon my want of liberty in taking my vows.—If you had no call, if you acted by constraint,

strait,

straint, might not you have said so in time?—And what purpose would it have answered?—Might not you have displayed the same firmness that you did at Saint-Mary's?—Can we be answerable, at all times, for the firmness of our hearts? The first time I was firm; the second time my weakness overcame me.—Might not you have called a lawyer? Might not you have entered a protest? You had four-and-twenty hours, in which you might have shewn proofs of reluctance.—Did I know any thing about these forms? Though I had known them, was I in a state to practise them, was it in my power? What! Madam, were not you yourself sensible of my derangement? Were I to call you as a witness, would you swear that I was sound in mind?—If you call me, I shall swear it!—Well, then, Madam, it is you, and not I, who are perjured.

—My

—My child, you are going to make a very needless noise. Recollect yourself, I conjure you, by your own interest, and that of the house : such affairs are always attended with scandalous discussions.—This will not be my fault.—The people of the world are wicked ; they will make suppositions the most unfavourable respecting your understanding, your heart, and your morals ; they will think.....—whatever they please.—But speak to me ingenuously ; if you have any secret discontent, whatever it be, it is capable of a remedy.—I have been, I am, and I shall be dissatisfied with my condition as long as I live.—Could the seducing spirit, which is continually watching us, and who lies in wait to destroy us, take advantage of the liberty which we have granted you lately, to inspire you with some fatal propensity?—No, Madam ;
you

you know that I never took an oath without reluctance ; I take God to witness, that my heart is innocent, and that it never knew a dishonourable sentiment.—This is inconceivable.—Nothing, Madam, is easier to be conceived. Every one has a character of her own, and I have mine: you love the monastic life, I hate it ; you have the graces of your condition, and I do not possess them; you would be undone in the world, and here you secure your salvation; I shall ruin myself here, and I hope for salvation in the world : I am, and always shall be, a bad nun.—And, wherefore? There is no person who performs her duty better than you.—But it is with pain and reluctance.—You have the greater merit.—No person can know better than I do myself what I merit ; and I am compelled to acknowledge, that in submitting to

every thing, I merit nothing. I am tired of the profession of a hypocrite : in doing that which is the salvation of others, I render myself an object of detestation and condemnation. In a word, Madam, I know no true nuns but those who are destined so by a taste for retirement, and who would remain here, though they were confined neither by rails nor walls ; I am far from being of this number : my body is here, but my heart is not ; it is roaming at large ; and were I to be under the necessity of choosing between death, and perpetual confinement in the place where I now am, I would not hesitate to die. These are my sentiments.—How ! could you quit, without remorse, this veil, and these vestments, which have consecrated you to Jesus-Christ ?—Yes, Madam ; because I assumed them without reflection, and under constraint..... I replied

replied to her with a great deal of moderation, though it was not what my heart suggested; it said to me: Oh! that the moments were come, when I could tear them off, and cast them away!..... My answer threw her into a state of violent agitation; she turned pale; she wished to speak, but her lips trembled, and she did not know what to say to me. I walked at a quick pace backward and forward across my cell; and she cried out: O, my God! what will our Sisters say! O, Jesus! look down upon her with an eye of pity! Sister Saint-Susan.—Madam?—Is this then the part which you are to act? You mean to disgrace us, to render us the subject of common talk, and to become the object of it yourself; to ruin yourself!—I mean to go out of this place.—But, if it is only the house with which you are displeased,.....—It is the house, it is my

condition, it is the convent ; I will not be confined either here or elsewhere.— Child, you are possessed with the Devil ; it is he who agitates you, who makes you speak so, who distracts you ; it is an absolute truth : see in what a state you are !—In fact, I viewed myself, and I saw that my robe was all in disorder, that my handkerchief was almost turned round, and that my veil was fallen back upon my shoulders. My patience was quite wearied out with the talk of this wicked Superior, who had always spoken to me in a mild deceitful tone ; and I said to her with indignation : No, Madam, no ; I wish no more of this clothing, I'll have no more of it..... In the meanwhile I attempted to adjust my veil ; but, from the tremor of my hands, the more I attempted to put it right, the worse I made it ; till at last, out of all
5 patience,

patience, I seized it with violence, tore it away, and threw it upon the ground; remaining in the presence of my Superior, my forehead girt with a bandeau, and all my hair dishevelled. In doubt whether she ought to stay, she walked about, saying: O Jesus! she is possessed; it is an absolute fact, she is possessed!.....and the hypocrite, at the same time, crossed herself with the cross of her rosary. It was not long before I came to myself; I felt the indecency of my situation, and the imprudence of my discourse; I composed myself, I took up my veil and put it on; then turning to her, I said: Madam, I am neither mad nor possessed; I am ashamed of my violence, and I ask your pardon; but, judge from this circumstance, how ill the religious state becomes me, and how much I am justified in endeavouring to

withdraw from it if I can..... Without attending to me, she repeated: What will the world say? what will our sisters say?—Madam, said I to her, do you wish to avoid an exposure? there is one way of doing it. I do not reclaim my portion, I only ask my liberty. I do not desire you to open the gates to me, but take care only that to-day, to-morrow, or the day after, they may be ill guarded, and don't discover my escape till as late as possible..... Wretch! how dare you make such a proposal as this to me?—It is an advice which a wise and good Superior ought to follow, with respect to those for whom a convent is a prison; and the convent is one to me: if the laws to which I have appealed, disappoint my expectations, and if urged by the pangs of despair, with which I am already but too well acquainted,... you have a well...

well.... There are windows in the house.... There are walls before me.... I have a robe which I can tear in pieces.... I have hands which I can use.... Stop, wretch! you make me tremble. What! you can.....—I can, on failure of the means of putting a sudden end to the evils of life, refuse nourishment: we may eat and drink, or not, as we please.... If it should happen after what I have told you, that I should have the courage, and you know that in this I am not deficient; and that it requires more sometimes to support life than to encounter death; tell me, conceiving yourself at the judgement of God, whether you or I would appear in his sight the most guilty?..... Madam, I desire nothing to be returned, I never will require any thing from the house; only spare me a crime, and spare yourself the cause of

long remorse : let us concert together...

—Do you believe, Sister Saint Susan, that I can fail in my first duty, that I can be a party to crime, that I can take a share in sacrilege !—It is I, Madam, who am guilty of sacrilege every day, in profaning, by contempt, the sacred habit which I wear. Take it from me, I am unworthy of it ; send me out into the village in quest of the rags which cover the poorest peasant ; let the door of the cloister be open for my escape.—

And where will you go in order to be better ?—I know not where I shall go ; but evil is confined to those situations, in which God does not intend that we should live ; and God never intended that I should live in this convent.—

You have nothing.—True ; but poverty is not what I fear most.—Dread the disorders to which it leads.—The past is my guarantee for the future ; had I wished

wished to listen to criminal solicitations, I should now have been at liberty. But if I am to get out of this house, it shall be either with your consent, or by the authority of the laws. Take your choice.....

This conversation lasted for a considerable time. When I recollected what passed, I blushed at the imprudent and ridiculous things which I had done and said, but it was too late : The Superior was still repeating her exclamations : What will the world say ! what will our sisters say ! when the clock, which summoned us to service, reminded us to separate. She said to me at parting : Sister Saint-Susan, you are going to church ; pray God to sanctify you, and to give you the spirit of your condition ; ask your conscience, and believe its dictates ; it
is

is impossible but it must reproach you. I dispense with your singing.

We went down almost together. Service began; when it was finished, and all the sisters were about to separate, she struck the breviary with her hand, and stopped them. My sisters, said she to them, I desire that you will throw yourselves at the foot of the altar, and implore the mercy of God for a nun whom he has forsaken, who has lost the spirit of devotion, and all taste for the exercises of religion, and who is on the point of committing an action, sacrilegious in the sight of God, and disgraceful in the eyes of man.

I cannot paint to you the general surprise; in an instant, every one, without stirring, looked round at the countenances of her companions, expecting to see the guilty person betrayed

betrayed by her embarrassment. They all prostrated themselves, and prayed in silence. After a pretty considerable space of time, the Superior thundered, in a bass voice, the *Veni Creator*, in which she was followed by the rest, in the same tone ; after a second interval of silence, she knocked upon her desk, and and they all went out.

You may easily suppose the murmurs which were created in the community. Who is this ? Who is it not ? What has she done ? What does she intend to do ?.... These suspicions were not of long duration. My application was beginning to make a noise in the world ; I received endless visits, some bringing me reproaches, others advice ; I had the approbation of some, and the censure of others. I had only one way of justifying myself in the view of all, by
informing

informing them of the treatment I had received from my parents ; and you may conceive what management was necessary upon this point ; there were only a few persons who continued sincerely attached to me, beside M. Manouri, to whom I had committed my case, and to whom I had entirely disclosed my sentiments. When I was afraid of the torments with which I was menaced ; and when the dungeon into which I had been once dragged, represented all its horrors to my imagination, (for I already knew the fury of nuns) I communicated my fears to M. Manouri, who said to me : It is impossible for you to avoid every species of punishment, and you must lay your account with them ; all that you can do, is to arm yourself with patience, and to support them in the hopes of their termination. As for the dungeon, I promise you that
you

you shall never return thither : I'll take care of that.... In fact, he brought an order to the Superior, in a few days, to bring me forth as often as she should be required.

Next morning, after service, I was recommended to the public prayers of the community ; they prayed in silence, and repeated the same hymn in a low voice, that they had chanted the preceding night. The same ceremony was performed on the third day, with this difference, that they ordered me to place myself in the middle of the choir, while they recited the prayers for the dying, and the litanies, with *ora pro ea*. The fourth day there occurred a piece of mummary, which strongly remarked the capricious character of the Superior. At the conclusion of the service they made me lie down in a coffin, which was placed in the middle of the choir ; she set candlesticks

sticks by my side, with a pot of holy water; they covered me with a napkin, and recited the service of the dead, after which every nun, in passing, threw some holy water upon me, saying at the same time, *Requiescat in pace*. It is necessary to understand the language of the convent, in order fully to comprehend the sort of menace contained in these last words. Two of the nuns took off the napkin, put out the candles, and left me drenched to the skin with the water which they had maliciously sprinkled upon me. My clothes dried upon me, as I had not any others to change them. This mortification was followed by another. The community was assembled; they considered me as a reprobate; my conduct was treated as apostacy, and all the nuns were prohibited, on pain of disobedience, to speak to me, to assist me,

me, to come near me, or even to touch the things I used. These orders were rigorously executed. Our passages were so narrow, that in some places two persons could scarcely pass abreast. If I met any of the nuns, they either returned, or stood close with their back to the wall, holding their veil and their clothes, for fear they should touch mine. If they had any thing to receive from me, I put it upon the ground, and they took hold of it with a cloth: if they had any thing to give me, they threw it at me. If they were unfortunate enough to touch me, they believed themselves polluted, and they went to confess, and to get absolution from the Superior. It has been said, that flattery is mean and contemptible; it is also extremely cruel, and very ingenious, when it proposes to please by the mortifications which it invents. I was
deprived

deprived of all employment, as unworthy. At church they left a pew empty on each side of that which I occupied. I sat at table alone in the hall; they would not serve me: I was under the necessity of going to the kitchen to ask for my allowance; the first time, sister cook called out to me, Don't come here!..... I obeyed her.—What do you want? —Food—Food! you do not deserve to live.....— Sometimes I returned, and spent the day without nourishment; sometimes I urged my demand, till at last they would place upon the threshold meat which it would have been shameful to have offered to a dog; I wept while I took it up, and went away. If at any time I happened to arrive last at the door of the choir, I found it shut; I knelt down on my knees, and there waited the conclusion of the service. If it was in the garden, I returned to my cell.

cell. My strength however declining from the little nourishment I received, from the bad quality of what I used, and still more from the difficulty with which I endured so many reiterated marks of inhumanity, I felt that if I persisted in suffering without complaint, I should never see my suit brought to a conclusion. I resolved therefore to speak to the Superior. Although half dead with terror, I went and knocked at her door. She opened it, and seeing me, shrunk back several steps, saying: Apostate! be gone.—I withdrew.—Again: . . .—I retired once more.—What do you want?—Since neither God nor man has condemned me to die, I request, Madam, that you would give orders that I should be supplied with the means of supporting life.—Life! said she, repeating the observation of the cook, are you wor-

thy of enjoying that blessing?—God alone knows that; but I warn you, if nourishment is denied me, I shall be compelled to carry my complaints to those who have taken me under their protection. Here I remain only as a deposit, till my fortune and my state be decided.—Begone, said she, do not pollute me with the sight of you, I shall attend to your request.... I went away, and she shut the door after me with violence. She probably gave orders, but I was treated with hardly any more attention. They deemed it a merit to disobey her; they continued to send me the coarsest victuals, and they would even render them more disgusting, by mixing them with ashes, and every species of filth.

Such was the life I led while my suit was pending. I was not entirely discharged from appearing in the parlour; they could

could not deprive me of the liberty of conferring with my judges and with my advocate, although the latter was often obliged to employ threats to obtain an interview with me. Even then I was attended by one of the sisters, who complained if I spoke low, raged if I staid too long; interrupted, contradicted me; gave me the lie; repeated to the Superior my conversation, altered its import and misrepresented its tendency; and perhaps imputed to me language which I had never employed! They even went so far as to rob me; to strip me of every thing I possessed, to carry off my chairs, my coverlets and my quilt. I received no more clean linen; my clothes were in tatters, and I was almost destitute of shoes and stockings. I had the utmost difficulty to procure a little water; often have I myself been

obliged to go and bring it from the well, that well which I have already mentioned : they broke my utensils ; till at last I was obliged to drink the water I had drawn, without the possibility of conveying it to my apartment. If I passed under the windows, I was forced to run, or expose myself to the insults with which I was assailed from the cells. Some of the sisters have even spit in my face. I became careless of my person, to a degree that rendered me hideous. As they were apprehensive of the complaints I might make to our directors, I was prohibited from confession. One great festival day, I believe it was that of the Ascension, they contrived to derange my lock ; I could not appear at mass, and perhaps should have been absent from all the other services, had I not received a visit from M. Manouri, whom they told at
first

first that they knew not what was become of me; that I was no longer to be seen, and that I performed no action which christianity required. After a great deal of trouble, however, I removed the lock of my door, and repaired to the door of the choir, which I found shut, as usually happened when I did not arrive among the first. I had lain down upon the ground, with my head and back leaning against one of the walls, my arms across my breast, while the rest of my body, extended, closed up the passage. When the service ended, and the nuns presented themselves in order to retire, the first stopped short, the rest followed immediately behind her. The Superior suspected the matter, and said, Walk over her, it is nothing but a dead body. . . . Some of them obeyed, and trod upon me; others were less inhu-

man; but none of them ventured to offer their hand to raise me up. During my absence, they had carried off from my cell my little prayer desk, the portrait of our foundress, the rest of the pious images, and the crucifix; I had nothing left, but that which I carried at my rosary, and this too I was not long allowed to preserve; I lived then between four bare walls, in a room without a door, and without a chair to sit down upon; standing or stretched on a pallet of straw, deprived of the most necessary utensils, and therefore compelled to go out by night; while next day I was accused of disturbing the repose of the house, of wandering about, and reproached with having lost my understanding. As my cell was now unlocked, they would enter tumultuously during the night; they shouted, displaced my bed, broke

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broke my windows, and did every thing which could inspire me with af-fright. The noise seemed to mount up, and then to descend; and those who were not in the plot, said that strange things passed in my apartment; that they had heard dismal sounds, cries, clanking of chains; that I held converse with ghosts and wicked spirits; that I must needs have made a covenant with the devil; and that it was high time to leave the part of the house where I lived. There are in every community, a number of weak heads: they even compose a majority. These believed every word they heard; were afraid to pass my door; their perturbed imagination represented my form to them as hideous and frightful; when they chanced to meet me, they made the sign of the cross, and retired with the utmost speed, crying: Away from me, Satan! My

God, come to my aid ! . . . One of the youngest happening to be at the bottom of the passage, I was advancing to her, and there was no possibility of avoiding me. She was seized with the most terrible fright. First she turned to the wall, muttering in a tremulous tone : My God ! my God ! Jesus ! Mary ! I continued to advance. When she perceived that I was near her, she covered her face with her hands, that she might not see me ; and springing forward, precipitated herself into my arms : and then what cries of mercy ! I am lost ! Sister Saint Susan, do not hurt me ! Sister Saint Susan, have pity upon me ! . . . And with these words down she dropped, half dead, upon the floor. Her cries assembled a number of the sisters ; she was carried away ; and it is impossible for me to describe how this accident was misrepresented. It was converted

verted into an affair of the most criminal nature. It was said that the demon of impurity had taken possession of my soul ; designs and actions, which I cannot name, were imputed to me ; and desires of a strange and extravagant description, to which the disorder the young nun had fallen into, was ascribed. I am not a man indeed, and do not understand the suspicions to which two women, much less a single woman, may be subject ; yet, as my bed had no curtains, and they entered my apartment at all hours, I must confess, Sir, that according to my ideas, with all their seeming reserve, the modesty of their looks, the chastity of their expressions, the hearts of these women must have been greatly corrupted. They knew at least that improper actions were committed by a person in private, of which I was entirely ignorant, and therefore

fore never perfectly comprehended the nature of the accusations under which I laboured; and they expressed themselves in terms so obscure, that I never knew what answer was to be made to their charge. Were I to pursue the detail of my persecutions, my story would never end. Ah! Sir, if you have children of your own, learn from my fate the sufferings you prepare for them, if you permit them to embrace the religious life, without the strongest and most decisive marks of vocation. How unjust, how inconsistent is the conduct of people in the world! A girl is allowed to dispose of her liberty at an age when she would not be allowed to dispose of a guinea. But your daughter to death, rather than imprison her in a cloister against her inclinations; put her to death without hesitation. How often have I wished that my mother had stifled
me

me at my birth ! She then had been less cruel than she was. Could you seriously believe that I was deprived of my breviary, and forbidden to pray to God ? You may well imagine that I did not obey this injunction. Alas, it was the only consolation I possessed. I would raise my hands to heaven ; I breathed the accents of suffering ; and I ventured to hope that they were heard by the only Being who witnessed the whole extent of my misery. They listened at my door ; and one day, when I was addressing myself to God, in the anguish of my heart, and imploring his assistance, they said to me : You implore God in vain, there is no God for you ; die, desperate wretch, and be damned.—Others added. Amen ; such be the lot of the apostate ! Amen, such be hers !

But the following is an incident that you will consider more extraordinary than

than any other. I cannot determine whether it was the effect of malice or of illusion. The circumstance, however, was this. Although no part of my conduct discovered a disordered mind, much less a mind possessed by the infernal spirit, they held a deliberation whether it was not necessary to exorcise me, and, by a plurality of voices, they concluded that I had renounced my chrism and my baptism; that I was possessed by the demon, and that his influence estranged me from divine services. Another added, that at certain prayers I gnashed my teeth, shuddered in the church, and twisted my arms during the elevation of the holy sacrament. According to some, I trampled upon the cross; I no longer carried my rosary (which by the way they had stolen); I uttered blasphemies too dreadful to be repeated. All agreed that
there

there was something unnatural about me, of which the Grand Vicar must be apprised. This was accordingly done.

The Grand Vicar was a M. Hebert, a man of age and experience, blunt in his character, but just and enlightened. He was informed, in full detail, of the disorder which prevailed in the house; and certain it is that it was not inconsiderable, and that if the cause could be imputed to me, it was of a nature perfectly innocent. You may easily imagine, that in the memorial which was laid before him, they did not omit my nocturnal perambulations, my absence from the choir, the tumults, which happened in my apartment, the strange sights which some had seen, the extraordinary sounds which others had heard, my aversion to spiritual exercises, the blasphemies of which I was guilty, and the obscenities with which

I was charged. The adventure of the young nun they represented in any light which their imagination chose to supply. The accusations were so strong, and so numerous, that, with all his good sense, M. Hebert could not help, in some measure, considering them in a serious point of view, and believing that they contained a great deal of truth. The affair appeared to him of so much importance, as to require a personal examination, that he might be able to judge of its real situation. He announced his intended visit, and he actually arrived, accompanied by two young ecclesiastics who had been appointed to attend him, and who relieved him by their assistance in the discharge of the laborious part of the duties he had to fulfil.

A few days before his arrival, I heard a person softly enter my chamber at midnight.

midnight. I remained silent, while I was addressed in a low and tremulous voice : Sister Saint Susan, are you asleep ?—No. Who is there ?—It is I.—Who are you ?—A friend of yours who is overwhelmed with terror, and who exposes herself to ruin to communicate to you a piece of intelligence, from which perhaps you can derive no advantage. Attend ; to-morrow or next day a visit from the Grand Vicar is expected ; you are to be accused ; prepare for your defence. Adieu ; have courage, and God be with you.... Saying this, she glided away with the swiftness of a shadow. You see, there are every where, even in religious houses, hearts of a compassionate disposition, which no circumstances can harden.

All this while, my suit was prosecuted with vigour. Crowds of people
of

of every situation, of both sexes; and all conditions; with whom I was unacquainted, interested themselves in my fortune, and solicited in my favour. You were of this number; and perhaps you are better acquainted than I am with the history of my cause, for at last I was not permitted to converse with M. Manouri. He was told that I was sick. He suspected that they meant to deceive him; he trembled lest they had thrown me into the dungeon. He applied to the Archbishop's court; but they did not even deign to give him a hearing; they had been prepossessed with the idea that I was mad, or something worse. He had recourse to the interposition of the civil court, and insisted upon the execution of the order intimated to the Superior; to present me, dead or alive, when she was summoned to that effect. The secular Judges encroached upon the functions;

functions of the ecclesiastical courts. The latter were aware of the consequences which this incident might produce, if they failed to obviate the cause; and this, in all probability, accelerated the visit of the Grand Vicar; for these gentlemen, harassed by the eternal broils of the convent, are very unwilling to interfere, because they know by experience, that their authority is always eluded and despised.

I availed myself of the advice of my friend, to implore the assistance of God to collect my spirits, and to prepare for my defence. Of heaven, I only entreated the happiness of being interrogated and heard with impartiality; I obtained this request; but I am now to inform you at what price. If it was my interest to appear to the Judge innocent and rational, it was of no less importance to the Superior that I should

be considered vicious, guilty, distracted, possessed by the infernal spirit. Accordingly, in proportion as I redoubled the fervour of prayers and the exercises of devotion, they redoubled the mischievous tricks with which I was tormented. I received no nourishment but what was barely necessary to prevent my dying of hunger; I was harassed and exhausted with mortifications; terrors of every kind were multiplied around me; of the refreshment of sleep I was utterly deprived. They put in practice every thing which could destroy my health and derange my mind. They exercised a refinement of cruelty, of which you can form no idea. Judge of the rest from the following instance. One day, when I was going from my cell to church, or elsewhere, I saw a pair of tongs upon the ground across the passage. I stooped to take them up, and

and place them in such a manner, that they might easily be found by the person who had mislaid them. The light prevented me from observing that they were almost red ; I took hold of them, but in dropping them again, they carried along with them, all the skin of the inside of my hand. In the places through which I had to pass, they continued to throw in my way something or other, either to catch my feet, or to strike my head. An hundred times have I been wounded severely ; I wonder how I escaped with my life. I was not allowed any light to direct me, and I was obliged to proceed trembling, with my hands before me, groping the way. They used to scatter broken glass under my feet. I was fully determined to disclose all these circumstances, and I pretty exactly kept my word. I often found the doors of the conveniencies shut, and

was compelled to descend several stories, and run to the bottom of the garden, when I found the door open ; and when I did not. . . . Ah ! Sir, what malicious creatures are these recluse women, who know well that they second the hatred of their Superior, and who imagine that they serve God, by tormenting you to death ! The time was now arrived, when the visit of the Arch-deacon was to take place ; the time was now come when my suit was to be terminated.

In reality, this was the most terrible moment of my whole life ; for consider, Sir, that I was absolutely ignorant of the colours under which I had been represented to this ecclesiastic, and that he came with the curiosity of seeing a girl possessed by the infernal spirit, or counterfeiting that situation. My persecutors imagined, that nothing but a violent

violent fright could display me under this appearance, and they adopted the following method to effect their purpose.

Upon the day the visit was expected, the Superior entered my room very early in the morning, accompanied by three sisters, one carrying a vessel of holy water, the other a crucifix, the third a bundle of cords. The Superior said to me in a harsh and threatening tone: Rise..... I rose.—Kneel down upon your knees and recommend yourself to God.—Madam, said I, before I obey your command, may I ask you what is to be my fate? what are the sufferings to which you have doomed me? and what requests I ought to address to God?.... A cold perspiration overspread my body, I trembled, I felt my knees sink under me, I gazed with fright upon her three fatal companions.

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They were standing in a row, with gloomy ill-boding countenances, their lips close, and their eyes shut. Terror had disconnected every word of the question I asked ; from the silence which they preserved , I imagined that I had not been understood. Again I began to repeat the last words of the question , for I had not courage to go over the whole ; in a feeble and half-extinguished voice I then said : What petition must I address to God ?... They replied : Implore his forgiveness for all the sins you have committed in the course of your life ; address him in the same manner as if you were about to appear before him..... At these words I believed that they had determined upon my destruction. I had heard, indeed, that similar practices sometimes occurred in the convents of certain religious orders of your sex,

sex; that they tried, condemned to death, and consigned to punishment. I never had conceived, however, that this inhuman jurisdiction was exercised in any convent of women; but there were many other things which never entered my imagination, that were there practised. At the idea of immediate death I felt an inclination to cry, but my mouth opened, and no sound could I utter. I advanced to the Superior in a suppliant posture, but my body refused its service, and I sunk backwards. I fell; but my fall was not severe. At these moments, when our strength forsakes us, when we swoon away, the members drop insensibly from each other; they, as it were, weigh each other down, and nature, unable to support herself, seems anxious to prepare a gentle fall for her wearied powers. I lost all sense and feeling; I

only heard around me a burst of confused and distant voices, either of persons speaking, or which arose from the ringing in my ears; I distinguished nothing but this ringing, which continued. I am ignorant how long I remained in this situation, but I was recovered from it by a sudden sensation of cold, which occasioned a slight convulsion, and drew from me a deep sigh. I was immersed in water, which streamed from my clothes to the ground; it was the contents of a large vessel of holy water, which they had dashed over my body. I lay upon my side, stretched out in this water, with my head leaning against the wall, my mouth half open, my eyes almost set, and quite closed. I endeavoured to open them, and to look at objects; but it seemed to me as if I had been enveloped in a thick atmosphere, through

which I discovered nothing but a floating robe, on which I attempted to lay hold, but without success. I made an effort with the arm which was at liberty (upon the other I was supported) ; I attempted to raise it, but it was too heavy ; my extreme weakness subsided by degrees ; I raised myself up, leaning my back against the wall, my two hands immersed in the water, my head reclining upon my breast. In this situation I uttered a deep-drawn note of complaint, in faltering broken accents, rendered inarticulate by the pressure under which I struggled. These women gazed on me with an expression of countenance, that displayed a rigour so invincible, and an inflexibility so obdurate, as left me no courage to solicit their compassion. The Superior said : Place her upright..... They took me by the arms, and raised me up. The Superior

perior added : Since she will not recommend herself to God, so much the worse for her ; you know what you have to do, complete your task.... I imagined that the cords they had brought along with them were intended to strangle me ; I looked at them, while the tears started into my eyes. I craved permission to kiss the crucifix, but my request was refused. I asked leave to kiss the cords, which were immediately presented : I leaned forward, took the Superior's scapulary, kissed it, and said : My God, have compassion upon me ! my God, have compassion upon me ! Dear sisters, endeavour to spare me unnecessary pain..... I then presented my neck. It is impossible for me to describe the state into which I sunk, or in what manner they now treated me ; certain it is, that persons who are conducted to punishment, and
such

such was my situation, are dead before they are executed. When I recovered the use of my senses, I found myself seated upon the pallet of straw which formed my bed, my hands tied behind my back, with a large iron cross upon my knees..... I see, Sir, at this distance, all the trouble which I occasion you; but you expressed a wish to know whether I in any degree deserved the compassion which I expect from your goodness.

It was at this time that I experienced the superiority of christianity above all the religions in the world, and discovered the profound wisdom contained in what blind philosophy calls the foolishness of the cross. In the situation in which I was placed, what consolation could I have derived from the contemplation of a fortunate legislator, covered with glory? I set before me him that was
without

without offence, crowned with thorns, his hands and feet pierced with nails, and expiring in agonies. I then would say to myself: Behold the situation of my God, and dare I complain? . . . I dwelt upon this idea, and I felt consolation springing up again in my heart. I knew the vanity of life, and I thought myself too happy to lose it before I had time to multiply my transgressions. Yet I reckoned my years, and found that I was hardly nineteen years of age, and I sighed. I was too much weakened, too much depressed, to allow my mind to rise superior to the terrors of death. In perfect health, I believe that I should have been able to take my resolution with greater fortitude.

In the mean time, the Superior and her satellites returned, and found me possessed of greater presence of mind than they expected, and than they would
have

have wished. They raised me up ; they put on my veil ; two of them supported me under the arms, a third pushed me from behind, and the Superior ordered me to walk. I went without knowing whither I was going ; under the apprehension, however, that I was about to be punished, I said : My God, have pity upon me ! My God, support me ! My God, do not forsake me ! Pardon me, my God, if I have offended thee !

I entered the church. The Grand Vicar had celebrated mass, the community was assembled. I forgot to tell you, that when I had got the length of the church door, the three nuns who had the charge of me, seized me fast, pushed me with violence, and seemed to struggle about me ; those who held my arms dragging me on, while the rest, who were behind, kept me back,

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as if I had been resisting, and shewing signs of repugnance to enter the church, which was by no means the case. They conducted me to the steps of the altar; I had scarce ascended them, when they pulled me down upon my knees, as if I had refused to kneel; they held me as if I had an intention of making my escape. They chanted the *Veni Creator*, laid out the holy sacrament, and pronounced the blessing. At that part of the blessing, where they testify veneration by an inclination of the body, those who held my arms affected to use compulsion in making me bow, and the rest leaned their hands upon my shoulders. I was sensible of all these various movements, but it was impossible for me to devise their object; soon after however, every thing was developed.

After the blessing, the Grand Vicar divested himself of his chasuble, put
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on his albe and his stote, and advanced towards the steps of the altar, where I was upon my knees; he was between two ecclesiastics, with his back turned upon the altar, upon which the holy sacrament was laid out, and his face directed to my quarter. He approached me, and said: Sister Susan, rise. . . . The sisters who held me suddenly raised me up; others came round me, and seized me by the middle, as if they were afraid lest I should make my escape. He added, Let her be untied. . . They did not obey, but pretended to be aware of the inconvenience or danger of setting me at liberty; but I have told you that this was a spirited man; and he repeated, in a firm and severe tone, Let her be untied. . . . They obeyed. Scarcely were my hands at liberty, when I uttered a woeful piercing cry, which made him turn pale, and the hypocritical

hypocritical nuns, who were about me, run away as if affrighted. He recovered himself; the sisters returned with trembling steps; I remained motionless, and he said to me, What ails you? I made no reply, but shewed him my two arms; the cord with which they had bound me had entered almost entirely into the flesh, and the blood, which had been prevented from circulating, and which was now extravasated, gave them a purple hue; he conceived that my cry arose from the sudden affection occasioned by the blood resuming its course. He said, Let her veil be taken off. They had stitched it in several places without my knowledge, which rendered this a more difficult and violent operation than it would otherwise have been: it behoved the priest to see me beset, possessed, or mad; in the mean while,
from

from the force employed in tearing it off, the threads gave way in some places, and the veil, or my habit being rent in others, he had an opportunity of seeing me. I had an interesting figure; deep sorrow had altered, but not destroyed its character; the tones of my voice were pathetic, and they were sensible that my expression was undissembled. The union of these qualities made a strong impression of pity upon the young attendants of the Archdeacon; as for him, he was entirely ignorant of such sentiments; just, but possessed of little susceptibility, he was one of those who have the misfortune to be born to practise virtue, without experiencing any pleasure in it; they do good from a principle of fitness, as they call it. He took the sleeve of his stole, and putting it upon my head, he said to me: Sister Susan, do you believe in God, the Father,

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ther, Son, and Holy Spirit?—I replied : I do.—Do you believe in the holy church our mother?—I do.—Do you renounce Satan and his works?—Instead of answering, I moved suddenly forward, and cried out, and his stole fell off my head. He was troubled, his companions turned pale; some of the sisters ran away, others of them, who were in their stalls, left them in the greatest confusion. He made a signal to them to compose themselves; he looked earnestly at me, expecting something extraordinary to take place. He took courage on my saying to him, Sir, it is nothing; it was one of these nuns who pricked me with something sharp; and, raising my eyes and my hands to heaven, while I shed a flood of tears, I added: It is because they hurt me at the very moment when you asked me if I renounced Satan

Satan and his works; their reason for which I well know..... They all protested, in the voice of the Superior, that they had not touched me. The Arch-deacon replaced his stole upon my head, and the nuns were again drawing near, but he made a signal to them to keep at a distance; and he repeated the question to me, if I renounced Satan and his works, to which I replied with firmness: I renounce them, I renounce them..... He made them bring a Christ, which he presented to me to kiss; and I kissed it upon the feet, upon the hands, and upon the wound in the side. He commanded me to worship it in a loud voice; I fell upon the earth, and upon my knees I said: "My God, my Saviour, thou who diedst upon the cross for my sins, and those of the human race, I adore thee; apply to me the merits of those torments
O 2 " which

“ which thou enduredst ; touch me
“ with a drop of that precious blood
“ which thou hast shed, and I shall be
“ purified. Pardon me, my God, as
“ I pardon my enemies,....” He then
said to me, Make a deed of faith....
and I made it. Make a deed of love....
and I made it. Make a deed of hope....
and I made it. Make a deed of cha-
rity.... and I made it. I do not re-
collect the terms in which they were
conceived, but I think they must have
been pathetic, for I drew sighs from
some of the nuns, and two of the
young ecclesiastics shed tears : the
Archdeacon asked me, with astonish-
ment, where I got the prayers which I
had just now recited. I said, They
come from the bottom of my heart, and
I take God to witness, who hears
every thing, and who is present at this
altar, that they are my thoughts and
5. sentiments,

sentiments. I am a christian, I am innocent; if I have been guilty of some faults, God only knows them, and none but he has a right to ask for an account of them, or to punish them.... When I uttered these words, he cast a terrible look upon the Superior.

The rest of the ceremony being finished, in which the Majesty of God was insulted, things the most sacred profaned, and the minister of the church rendered ridiculous; all the nuns retired, except the Superior, who remained with me and the young ecclesiastics. The Archdeacon sat down, and taking out a memorial which they had presented to him against me, he read it aloud, and questioned me upon the articles which it contained. Why, said he to me, don't you confess?—Because they will not permit me.—Why don't you attend at the sacraments?—Because

they will not permit me.—Why don't you assist at Mass, and at divine service?—Because they will not permit me. Here the Superior wished to speak, but he said to her in the same tone, Be silent, Madam. . . . Why do you go out of your cell at night?—Because they have deprived me of water and every necessary accommodation.—How comes there to be a noise in your bed-room, and in your cell?—Because they will not allow me to take repose. Here the Superior attempted a second time to speak, and he said to her, Madam, I have told you to be silent; you will have an opportunity of answering when I interrogate you. . . . How happened it that they were obliged to extricate a nun from your hands, whom they found thrown down in the passage?—It is the consequence of the horror at me, with which
5 they

they had inspired her. — Is she your friend? — No, Sir. — Were you never in her cell? — Never. — Did you never do any thing improper, either to her, or to others? — Never. — Why did they bind you? — I don't know. — Why is not the door of your cell shut? — Because I have broken the lock. — Why did you break the lock? — To get out, in order to assist at service on the ascension-day. — You were at church then on that day? — Yes, Sir... — The Superior said, Sir, it is not true, all the community. . . . I interrupted her I will testify that the door of the choir was shut; that they found me prostrated at this door, and that you ordered them to trample upon me, which some of them did; but I forgive them, and you Madam, for having ordered them; I am not come to accuse any person, but to defend myself. — Why have you nei-

ther a rosary, nor a crucifix ?—Because they have taken them from me.—Where is your breviary ?—They have taken that also.—How can you pray then ?—I pray from the heart, though they have prohibited me from doing it.—Who is it that issued the prohibition ?—Madam. . . . Here the Superior was still going to speak. Madam, said he to her, is it true or false, that you have prohibited her from praying ? Say yes, or no.—I believed, and I had reason to believe. . . .—This is not to the purpose ; have you prohibited her from praying ; Yes, or No ?—I have prohibited her, but. . . .—She was about to continue, when the Archdeacon resumed ; But Sister Susan, how come your feet to be naked ?—Because they will not furnish me either with stockings or shoes.—Why are your linen and your clothes so old and dirty ?—Because they

they have refused me linen for more than three months, and I am obliged to sleep in my clothes.---Why do you sleep in your clothes?---Because I have neither curtains, mattrass, blankets, sheets, nor night dress.---Why have not you them?---Because they have taken them from me.---Do you get food? ---I ask for it.---You don't get it then? —I was silent, and he added, It is incredible that they can have used you with so much severity, without your having committed some fault to merit it.---My fault is having no call to the religious state, and recalling my vows, which I never made voluntarily.---It is for the laws to decide upon this affair; and however they may pronounce upon it, it is incumbent on you in the mean time to discharge the duties of the religious life.---No person, Sir, is more punctual than I am.---You must share
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the lot of all your companions.—That is all I ask.---Have you no complaint to make against any one ?---No, Sir ; I have told you, that I am not come here as an accuser, but for the purpose of defending myself.---Go away.---Where shall I go, Sir ?---To your cell.---I took a few steps and then returned, and prostrated myself at the feet of the Superior, and of the Archdeacon. Well, said he to me, what is the matter ?---I said to him, You see ! shewing him at the same time, my head bruised in several places, my feet bloody, my arms livid, and without flesh ; my clothes dirty and torn.

I think I hear you, Mr. Marquis, and most of those who read these Memoirs, say, “ Horrors so multiplied, “ so varied, so continued ; a series of “ atrocities so monstrous engendered in “ the hearts of nuns ! it is not very probable... “ bable...

“ bable. . . !” I grant it, but it is true ; and may Heaven, which I now call to witness, judge me with the utmost rigour, and doom me to eternal fire, if I have suffered calumny to darken one of my lines with its slightest shade ! Though I have long experienced how much the aversion of a Superior can stimulate her natural perversity, particularly when it is such as to make a merit of crime, and to applaud and to boast of guilt, resentment shall never prevent me from being just. The more I reflect, the more I am persuaded, that what has happened to me, never did happen, and perhaps never will happen to another. Once, (and God grant the first time may be the last !) Providence, whose views are unknown to us, has been pleased to heap upon a single unfortunate individual, all the mass of cruelties, divided in its inscrutable

table decrees among an infinite multitude who have preceded, and who shall succeed her in the cloister. I have suffered, I have suffered much ; but the lot of my persecutors seems still more deplorable than mine. I would rather, I would much rather die, than give up my situation, on condition of accepting theirs. My pains will be brought to a conclusion, I hope, by the exertion of your goodness : the remembrance, shame, and remorse of crime, will live with them till their latest hour. They now reproach themselves ; without doubt, they will reproach themselves as long as they live, and terror will descend with them to the tomb : in the mean time, Mr. Marquis, my present situation is deplorable : life is committed to me as a charge ; I am a woman ; I am subject to the weakness that is common to my sex ;

sex; God may abandon me: I feel that I have neither strength nor courage long to bear up under what I have hitherto supported. Mr. Marquis, dread lest the fatal moment arrives when you shall weep over my destiny, when you shall be harrowed with remorse. I shall not return from the abyss into which I shall have fallen, and which will be for ever shut upon me.

Retire, said the Archdeacon to me. One of the ecclesiastics presented his hand to raise me up, and the Archdeacon continued: I have heard you, I am now about to hear your Superior, and I will not leave this place till order is re-established. . . . , I withdrew. I found the rest of the house in alarm; all the nuns were at the doors of their cells, conversing across the passage. As soon as I appeared, they retired, and their doors, which they shut with violence,

lence, one after the other, resounded loudly through the mansion. I entered my cell. I dropped upon my knees against the wall, and prayed God to consider the moderation with which I had spoken to the Archdeacon, and to impress his mind with a conviction of my innocence, and of the truth.

I was engaged in prayer, when the Archdeacon, his two companions, and the Superior, entered my cell. I have mentioned that I had neither prayer-desk, tapestry, chairs, curtains, mattress, sheets, utensils; lock to my door, nor hardly a single whole pane of glass in my windows. I rose; and the Archdeacon, stopping short and turning to the Superior, with eyes full of indignation, said: Well, now Madam?—She replied, I was ignorant of this.—You were ignorant of it! it is false; have you passed a single day without visiting
this

this apartment? and do you not descend to your own chamber after you have been here? Sister Susan, speak; was not Madam the Superior here to-day?—I made no answer, he did not urge me; but the young ecclesiastics, dropping their arms, with their heads reclined, and their eyes fixed upon the ground, discovered their surprise and their distress. They all went out together; and I heard the Archdeacon say to the Superior in the passage, You are unworthy of the office which you fill; you ought to be deposed. All this disorder must be repaired before I quit this house; and, shaking his head as he walked along he added, This is horrible—Christians indeed! nuns! human beings! it is horrible!

After this, I heard no more of the subject; but I was supplied with linen, and other articles of dress; with curtains,

tains, sheets, blankets, furniture; my breviary, my books of devotion, my rosary, my crucifix, were restored; my windows were repaired; in short, I received every thing necessary to my accommodation, as other nuns. I was again admitted to the parlour, but only when my business required.

My suit proceeded with little success. M. Manouri published his first memorial, which excited little interest. It contained too much wit, too little of the pathetic, and scarcely any argument. Yet the fault must not altogether be charged to this able lawyer. I absolutely would not consent that he should attack the reputation of my parents; I required that he should forbear to scandalize the religious order, and especially the house in which I lived; I desired that he would not represent my sisters and my brothers-in-law in too odious colours,

lours. In my favour I had only the first protestation I had made, a solemn one indeed, but taken in the first convent, and in no shape renewed since that period. When such narrow limits are assigned to a defence, against those who assume the utmost latitude of attack, who trample without distinction upon what is just and what is unjust, who assert and deny with the same impudence; who are deterred by no blush of shame in the imputations which they charge, the suspicions they insinuate, the slander and the calumny which they invent; it is difficult to come off victorious in the contest, especially before courts, where the habits of business, and the irksomeness which practice is apt to produce, almost always preclude a scrupulous examination, even in matters of the highest importance; where disputes like mine too are always

regarded with an unfavourable eye by the politician, who dreads that upon the success of one nun reclaiming against her vows, an infinite number of others might be induced to prosecute a similar measure. They are conscious of a secret feeling, that if the prison doors were allowed to be thrown open, to restore an unfortunate inhabitant to liberty, the crowd would be stimulated by the precedent to attempt to burst them asunder by force. The prevailing policy is, to discourage similar proceedings, and, by the difficulty of a change in our situation, to induce us to be resigned to our fate. It appears to me, however, that in a well-regulated state, a course directly the reverse ought to be followed ; the religious life ought to be rendered difficult to enter, and easy to abandon. And why ought not this case to be placed

placed upon the same footing with so many others, where the smallest defect of formality invalidates the proceedings, though in other respects just? Are convents then so essential to the constitution of a state? Did Jesus Christ institute the orders of monks and nuns? Is it absolutely impossible for the church to dispense with these appendages? What need has the bridegroom of so many foolish virgins, and the human species of so many victims? Will the necessity never be felt of narrowing the mouth of those abysses, into which future races of mankind are about to plunge and be destroyed? Are all the hackneyed rounds of devotion performed within their walls worth a single farthing which pity bestows upon the poor? Does God, who created man a social being, approve his seclusion? Can God, who formed him

frail and inconstant, authorize the temerity of his vows? Can those vows which outrage the general propensity of nature, be even well observed, except by a few ill-constructed beings, in whom the germs of the passions are injured, and who properly should be referred to the class of monsters, if our knowledge permitted us to discern with equal facility the internal structure of man, as to perceive his outward form? Are all those gloomy ceremonies that are observed on the taking of the habit, and at the time of profession, when a man or a woman is devoted to the monastic life, and to misery—have they the power of suspending the animal functions? On the contrary, do they not awake amid silence, constraint and sloth, with a violence unknown to those who live in the world, whose attention is varied and occupied by the number of objects which

which

which occur? Where is it that we behold the imagination haunted by impure phantoms, which pursue and agitate the mind? Where is it that we discover that profound discontent, that pallid look, that meagre countenance, those symptoms of wasting, declining nature? Where do you observe nights consumed in groans, days spent in melancholy, for which no cause can be assigned, followed by tears for which no reason can be found? Where does it occur, that nature, outraged by a constraint for which she is not formed, breaks down every obstacle by which she is opposed, becomes furious, and throws the animal economy into a disorder for which no remedy can be found? In what place have peevishness and discontent erased every social quality? In what society is it that there exists none of the endearing relations of
P 3 father,

father, brother, sister, parent, friend? In what situation is it that man, considering himself only a being that appears for a moment and passes on, treats the sweetest ties by which mortals are united, as a traveller views the objects that fall in his way—without interest, without attachment? Where is the region which hatred, and spleen, and vapours inhabit? Where do you meet with animosity that is never extinguished? Where do the passions brood in silence? Where do you place the abode of cruelty, and of curiosity? The history of these asylums is unknown, said M. Manouri, in his *Plaidoyer*, it is unknown.

A young lady asked permission of her parents to enter into the order of Ursulines. Her father said that he would consent, but that he gave her three years to consider of it. This condition

condition appeared severe to a young person full of fervour ; nevertheless, it was necessary to submit. This period elapsed ; and her call not being proved to be fallacious, she returned to her father, and told him that the three years had expired. Very well, my child, replied he, I allowed you a trial of three years ; I hope you will be so good as to allow me as many to form my resolution.... This conduct appeared still much more severe, tears were shed upon the occasion ; but the father was a man of firmness, who persevered in his purpose. At the end of these six years, she entered and made profession. She was a good nun ; simple, pious, exact in all her duties ; but it happened that the directors abused her frankness, to obtain information of what passed in the house. Her Superiors suspected the truth. She was confined

and deprived of religious exercises, in consequence of which she became mad. And how is it possible that any mind could withstand the persecutions of fifty persons, busy from morning till night in tormenting you? They had previously spread a snare for the girl's mother, which strikingly displays the avarice of the Superiors. They were at pains to inspire the mother of this recluse, with the desire of entering the house, and visiting the cell of her daughter. She applied to the Grand Vicars, who granted her the favour she solicited. She entered, and flew to the cell of her daughter; but what was her astonishment, to see nothing but four bare walls! Every thing had been carried away. They had suspected that this tender and feeling mother would not allow her daughter to live in this situation; and in reality she furnished

it anew, supplied her with a stock of clothes and linen, protesting seriously to the nuns, that this curiosity cost her too dear to be repeated a second time; and that three or four visits a year like this, would ruin her brothers and sisters. . . . It is in these receptacles that ambition and pride sacrifice a part of a family to improve the fortunes of the rest: these are the common sewers into which the refuse of society are thrown. How many mothers are there like mine, who expiate a secret crime by the commission of another!

M. Manouri published a second memorial, which produced a little more effect. The suit was prosecuted vigorously. I again proposed to my sisters to leave them the entire and peaceable possession of the succession of my parents. There was one time at which my suit took the most favourable turn,
and

and when I entertained hopes of regaining my liberty. This glimpse of good fortune served, however, only the more cruelly to deceive me. My cause was pleaded at a public hearing, and lost. The whole community was apprised of the event, while I remained ignorant of it. What agitation, what tumult, what joy were displayed! Little secret clubs were held; they went backwards and forwards to the Superior's apartment, and the nuns to each other's cells. I trembled all over; I could neither leave my cell nor remain in it. I had no friend into whose arms I could run and throw myself. O what a cruel morning is that, when an important suit is to be decided! I wished to pray, but could not; I knelt down, I collected my thoughts, and began to repeat an orison; but in a moment my mind was transported,
in

in spite of myself, to the Court. I saw the Judges, I heard the advocates, I addressed myself to them ; I interrupted my own counsel, and thought my cause poorly defended. I knew none of the Judges ; yet I figured to myself images of them, of every character, some favourable, others hostile, a third party indifferent. I was in an agitation, in a flutter of ideas which it is impossible to conceive.—The noise I had heard was succeeded by a profound silence. The talk among the nuns ceased. I thought that in the choir their voices were unusually low, at least those who sung ; some of them did not sing at all. When service was over, they retired in silence. I imagined that they were as much disquieted by the expectation of the event as I was ; but about mid-day the noise and bustle suddenly revived on every side.

I heard doors open and shut, nuns going backwards and forwards, and the hollow murmurs of persons whispering. I applied my ear to the key-hole ; but it seemed to me that they were silent, and, as they passed, walked upon tip-toe. I conceived a presentiment that I had lost my cause. I no longer doubted it a moment. I paced round my cell without saying a word, my voice was stifled ; I was unable to utter a complaint ; I raised my hands to heaven. I leant sometimes upon one side of the wall, sometimes upon the other. I attempted to repose upon my bed, but was prevented by the violent beating of my heart ; and certain it is, that I heard it beat, and that it even raised my clothes. I was in this situation when I received a message, that a person wished to see me. I went down stairs. I durst not advance.

She

She who delivered me the message was so gay, that I thought the news I had to receive must necessarily be very sad ; however I went. When I reached the parlour-door, I stopped short, and threw myself into a corner between two walls. I was unable to support myself, yet I entered. Nobody was there—I waited. The person who called for me was prevented from appearing till I arrived. They suspected very strongly that he was a messenger from my advocate, they wished therefore to know what passed between us, and they assembled to listen. When he made his appearance, I was sitting with my head reclining upon my arm, and leaning upon the bars of the grate.—I come from M. Manouri, said he.—To inform me replied I, that I have lost my cause?—I don't know any thing of that, Madam ; but he gave me this letter. He seemed
grieved

grieved when he gave it me, and I have come here full speed, as he desired.—Give it me....—He presented the letter, which I took without stirring; and without looking at him, I put it upon my knees, and continued in my former posture. The man, however, asked me, Is there no answer?—No, said I, go.... He went away, and I continued still in the same posture, unable either to move, or to summon resolution to leave the place.

It is a rule in the convent, that you can neither write, nor receive letters, without the Superior's permission; and those you write, as well as those you receive, are submitted to her inspection. I was therefore obliged to carry her mine. For this purpose, I rose and proceeded to her apartment, I thought I should never have reached it; a prisoner who leaves his dungeon to hear
his

his sentence of condemnation pronounced, could not have walked either more slowly or more dejectedly. At length I arrived at her door. The nuns surveyed me at a distance, they were unwilling to lose the smallest circumstance of the spectacle of my sorrow, and my humiliation. I knocked at the door, which was opened. The Superior was within, along with some other nuns. This I perceived by the skirts of their robes, for I never had courage to raise my eyes. I presented my letter with a trembling hand. She took it from me, read it, and again put it into my hands. I returned to my cell, threw myself on the bed, the letter beside me; where I remained without reading it, without rising to go to dinner, without stirring till the afternoon service. At half past three the clock warned me to go down. Some
nuns

nuns had already assembled: the Superior was at the entrance of the choir; she stopped me, and commanded me to kneel behind the door upon the outside; the rest of the community arrived, and the door was shut. After service, they all went out; I allowed them to pass me, then rose, and followed last in the train. From this moment I began to condemn myself to endure whatever they were pleased to inflict. I was discharged from appearing at church, and I voluntarily forbore going to the hall, or to enjoy recreation. I viewed my situation in every way, and I discovered no resource but in submission, and in the necessity which they felt of employing my talents. I should have been contented with that kind of oblivion, in which for several days they allowed me to remain. The visits of different persons were announced; but
that

that of M. Manouri was the only one which I was permitted to receive. When I entered the parlour, I found him precisely in the situation in which I was when his messenger was introduced to me ; his head reclining upon his hands, and leaning upon the grate. I recognised him, but said nothing. He was afraid either to look at me or to speak. Madam, said he at last, without changing his posture, I wrote to you ; did you receive my letter ? — I received it, but have not read it. — You don't know then... — I know all, I conjectured what was my fate, and I have met it with resignation. — How are you treated ? — They have not yet begun to think of me, but I learn from the past, what I must expect in future. I have only one consolation, that deprived of the hope by which I was supported, it is impossible for me to en-

dure so much as I have already suffered; death will put a period to my misfortunes. The fault which I have committed, is one which in religious houses is never forgiven. I do not ask of God to soften the hearts of those, to whose discretion he has been pleased to abandon me, but I implore him to grant me strength to enable me to support my sufferings, to save me from despair, and speedily to call me to himself.—Madam, said he, weeping, had you been my own sister, I could have done no more..... This man's heart overflows with sensibility. Madam, continued he, if in any respect it is in my power to be useful to you, command my service. I shall visit the chief president, whose good opinion I enjoy; I shall likewise wait upon the Grand Vicars and the Archbishop.—Sir, do not give yourself the trouble to speak to
any

any one upon the subject; it is all over.—
But if it were possible to obtain permission for you to change your house?—It is attended with too many obstacles.—
But, pray what then are these obstacles?—The difficulty of obtaining permission, the necessity of depositing a new dowry, or of withdrawing the former one from this house; and, besides, what should I find in another convent? that inflexibility which characterises my heart, would still accompany me. I should meet with Superiors equally pitiless, and nuns equally unkind, as here. I should have the same duties to perform, and the same sufferings to endure. It is better that I should end my days in this place; at least the period of my misery will be less tedious.—Madam, you have interested in your favour many worthy persons, most of them are opulent;

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lent; here your departure will not be opposed, if you carry nothing along with you.—I believe so.—The death, or the departure of a nun, conduces to the interest of those who remain.—But those people of worth, those opulent people you mention, think no more of me, and you will find them very cold, when you propose to furnish me with a dowry at their expence. Why do you imagine that people of the world are more ready to contribute to rescue from the cloister a nun who has no call for the religious life, than pious persons are to introduce into the convent those who are really called to embrace that situation? Do the latter easily procure a dowry? Alas, Sir, I am forsaken by all the world since the loss of my suit; I now see nobody.—Only commit that affair to me, Madam, and I shall be most happy.—I ask nothing, I entertain
no

no hopes, I give no opposition to any thing you judge proper; the only spring I had left is now broken. Could I only promise myself that God would produce a change in my heart, and that the qualities of the religious state would succeed to the hope of quitting it, which I have now lost..... but that is impossible; this dress I wear has attached itself to my skin, to my bones, and yet only sits the more uneasy upon me. Ah! what a fate is mine! To be compelled for ever to be a nun, and to feel conscious that I must ever remain unfit for that state! to pass my whole life in beating my head against the gratings of my prison!.... Here I began to cry aloud; I endeavoured, but in vain, to suppress my voice. M. Manouri, surprised at this appearance, said: Madam, may I venture to ask you a question?—You may, Sir.—

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Must

Must not grief so violent be excited by some secret motive?—No, Sir; I hate a life of solitude; I feel that I detest it; I am conscious that I shall detest it as long as I live. I cannot submit to all the miseries which fill up the day of a recluse; it is a tissue of puerilities which I despise. I would have accommodated myself to them, could my exertions have succeeded. An hundred times have I endeavoured to impose upon my understanding, to overcome my repugnance, but in vain. I have envied, I have implored God to grant me, that happy imbecility of mind which my companions possessed; but I have not obtained it, and he will never be pleased to bestow it upon me. Every action I perform is wrong, every expression I utter is amiss; the defect of my vocation penetrates to every part of my conduct, and it does not pass with-

out

out observation. Every moment I insult the monastic life ; my incapacity is called pride : it is the employment of those with whom I live to expose me to humiliation ; faults and punishments multiply to infinity ; and I spend every day in measuring with my eye the height of the walls.—Madam, it is not in my power to level them with the ground, but I can do something else.—Sir, do not make any attempt.—You must change your house ; it shall be my business to enable you to put it in execution. I shall return and pay you another visit ; I hope I shall have access to you ; you shall hear of me without delay. Be assured, that if you agree to the attempt, I will succeed in effecting your liberation from this place. If you are treated here with extraordinary severity, do not fail to give me information.

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It

It was late when M. Manouri went away. I returned to my cell. Almost immediately we were summoned, by the bell, to evening service, and I was among the first who appeared. I allowed the nuns to pass me, and I took it for granted, that I was to remain at the door; and accordingly it was shut against me by the Superior. At supper, as she entered, she made me a sign to sit down upon the ground, in the middle of the refectory. I obeyed, and was only served with bread and water. I ate a little, while I bedewed my portion with my tears. Next day a council was held, and all the members of the community were assembled to hear my sentence. I was condemned to be deprived of recreation; to attend service, for a whole month, at the door of the choir; to receive my food, sitting upon the ground, in the middle of the refectory;

refectory; to undergo some ignominious punishment three days successively; to renew the assumption of the habit; and to repeat my vows; to use the hair cloth; to fast during two days; and to macerate myself every Friday after the evening service. I was placed upon my knees, with my veil dropped, while this sentence was pronounced.

Next morning the Superior came to my cell, accompanied by a nun carrying upon her arm a hair-cloth, and that robe of coarse stuff in which I was dressed when I was conducted to the dungeon. I perfectly understood the meaning of these preparations; I undressed myself, or rather they tore off my veil, stripped me of my clothes, and gave me the robe I have mentioned. My head was uncovered, my feet were bare, my long hair flowed over my shoulders, and my whole garb consisted

sisted of the hair-cloth, a very coarse shift, and the long robe which fastened round my neck and descended to my feet. In this situation I remained the whole day, and appeared at all the exercises we had to perform.

In the evening, when I had retired to my cell, I heard the sound of people approaching, chanting the litanies. The procession was composed of all the members of the house, ranged in two lines. They entered, and I appeared; they put a cord round my neck, a torch in the one hand, and a scourge in the other. One of the nuns took the end of the cord, and led me between the two ranks, and the procession moved on towards a small private oratory, consecrated to the holy Virgin. They came to my cell, chanting in a solemn voice, and they returned in silence. When I reached this little
oratory,

oratory, which was lighted up with two candles, I received orders to ask pardon of God, and of the community, for the scandal I had occasioned. The nun by whom I was conducted, told me in whispers what I was to say, and I repeated it word for word. After this, they took the cord from my neck, they stripped me to the middle, they threw my hair, which flowed over my shoulders, to one side, the scourge which I carried in my left hand was put into my right, and they began the *Miserere*. I understood what they expected me to do, and it was performed. The *Miserere* being concluded, I received a short exhortation from the Superior; the lights were extinguished, the nuns withdrew, and I again dressed myself.

When I returned to my cell, I felt violent pains in my feet; I examined them, and found them covered with
blood,

blood, from the wounds they had sustained from pieces of broken glass which the nuns had been so malicious as to scatter in my way.

I underwent this ignominious punishment, in the same manner, the two following days ; only on the last a psalm was added to the *Miserere*.

Upon the fourth day, my habit of a nun was restored to me, with almost the same ceremony which is practised at this solemnity when it is public.

Upon the fifth, I renewed my vows. In the course of a month I went through the rest of the penance which had been imposed upon me ; after which , by degrees , I returned to the ordinary state which prevailed in the community. I resumed my place in the choir, and in the refectory ; and I discharged, in my turn, the various functions of the house. But how great was my surprise, when I observed
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my young friend, who had so kindly interested herself in my fortune! She appeared to be almost as much altered as myself. She was frightfully extenuated, her countenance was pale as death, her lips were white, and her eyes almost sunk. Sister Ursula, said I to her in a whisper, what is the matter with you? What is the matter, replied she, I am attached to you, and yet you can ask me such a question! It was full time that a period should be put to your sufferings; had they continued longer, death must have proved the misery which I felt.

To her care was I indebted for the wounds my feet had escaped upon the two last days of my penance. She had the kindness privately to sweep the passages, and to remove the pieces of glass which were scattered in the way. On the days when I was condemned to live
on

on bread and water, she deprived herself of a part of her allowance, which she wrapt up in a clean cloth, and threw into my cell. The nun who was to lead me by the cord, was chosen by lot, and the lot fell upon her. She had the firmness to call upon the Superior, and protest to her, that she would sooner die than undertake this infamous and cruel office. Fortunately, this young lady's family was of considerable rank, and she enjoyed a large annuity, which she employed in a manner that pleased the Superior; and, for a few pounds of sugar and coffee, she found a nun to take her place. I will not be so presumptuous as to imagine, that the signal displeasure of God was displayed against the base creature who undertook the task, in the misfortune under which she has fallen. She has become mad, and is confined; but the
Superior

Superior lives, governs, torments, and enjoys perfect health.

It was impossible that my constitution could resist trials so rude and so lengthened ; I fell sick. In this critical situation it was that sister Ursula really testified the sincerity of the friendship she had conceived for me ; she saved my life. As she herself would sometimes tell me, what she had thus preserved could not be deemed a blessing ; yet there was no kind of service which I did not experience from her attention, on those days when it was her turn to preside in the infirmary. Neither was I neglected at other times, thanks to the interest she took in my welfare, and to the rewards which she distributed among those who nursed me, in proportion as they gave me satisfaction. She asked permission to watch me during the night ; and the
Superior

Superior refused her request, under pretext that she was too delicate to support the fatigue. This refusal she considered as a most afflicting disappointment. All the attentions she bestowed, however, could not check the progress of my distemper; I was reduced to the utmost extremity, and received the last sacraments. A few moments before they were administered, I requested to see all the members of the community assembled, and the favour was granted. The nuns stood round my bed, and the Superior in the middle of them. My young friend sat at my pillow, and held my hand, which she bedewed with her tears. They conjectured that I had something to say; they raised me up, and supported me in an erect posture, by the assistance of two pillows. Then addressing myself to the Superior, I entreated her benediction,

diction, and that she would forget the faults I had committed ; of all my companions I asked pardon for the scandal my conduct had occasioned. I had sent for an infinite number of toys, which formed either the ornaments of my cell, or were reserved for my particular use, and I entreated the Superior's permission to dispose of them ; she consented, and I bestowed them upon the nuns who had acted as her attendants when I was thrown into the dungeon. I desired her who had led me by the cord on the day of my penance, to approach, and embracing her, while I presented her with my rosary and crucifix, I said : Dear sister, remember me in your prayers, and be assured that I will not forget you before God.... And why did not the Supreme Being call me away at this moment ? I would have gone to him without dis-

quietude; and what a blessing is such a state of mind! Who can promise that he will possess it a second time? This trying occasion, however, must again return. May God then renew my sufferings, and let this solemn hour be as tranquil as that which I experienced! I saw the heavens opened, and doubtless they were, for then conscience no longer deceives, and mine gave me promise of eternal felicity.

After receiving the sacrament I felt into a kind of lethargy; all this night I was given over. From time to time they came and felt my pulse; I was sensible of the touch of hands groping over my face, and I heard, seemingly, distant voices, saying: It increases.... Her nose is cold.... She will not survive an hour.... The rosary and the crucifix will be yours..... While another, in a tone of resentment, said
Retire,

Retire, retire, allow her to die in peace; have you not already tormented her enough? How delightful were my sensations upon recovering from this crisis, and again opening my eyes, to find myself in the arms of my friend! She had never left me; she had passed the night in administering me assistance, in repeating the prayers for persons in their last agonies, in making me kiss the crucifix, and applying it to her own lips after withdrawing it from mine. When she saw my eyes roll, and heard me breathe a profound sigh, she imagined that it was my last, and calling me her friend, uttered doleful cries, saying, My God, have compassion upon her, and upon me! My God, receive her spirit!—Beloved friend, when you are before the throne of God, remember Sister Ursula!.... I looked on her sadly smiling, and dropped a tear as I pressed

her hand. At this moment M. Bourvard arrived. This was the physician of the house, reputed a man of ability, but despotic, haughty, and severe. He tore my friend from me with violence, he felt my pulse and my skin; he was accompanied by the Superior and her favourites. After a few short questions with regard to what had taken place, he answered, She will recover.... and turning to the Superior, who derived no pleasure from this observation, Yes, Madam, said he, she will recover, her skin is favourable, the fever has abated, life begins to dawn anew in her eyes.... At every word of this, joy beamed on the countenance of my friend, while on the features of the Superior and her companions was displayed a disappointment and chagrin which I cannot describe, and which their constraint was ill able to dissemble. Sir, said I, I no longer
longer

longer desire to live.... So much the worse, replied he ; and after giving certain orders, he departed. I was told, that during my lethargy I frequently repeated, Dear mother, you then beckon me to you ! I am coming to join you ! I will tell you all..... It was my old Superior whom probably I thus addressed ; I have no doubt of it. I gave her picture to no one, but desired to carry it along with me to the grave.

The prognostic of M. Bouvard was fulfilled ; the fever subsided ; it was carried off by copious perspirations, and no doubt was now entertained of my cure : I did indeed recover, but the period of my convalescence was very tedious. It was decreed that I should endure, in this house, all the sufferings it is possible to experience. My distemper was in its nature malignant ; and Sister Ursula had hardly ever left

me a moment. As I began to regain my strength, hers declined; her stomach was deranged; in the afternoons she was attacked by fainting fits, which sometimes lasted a quarter of an hour: in this situation she appeared as dead; her eyes sunk; a cold sweat covered her brow, and, collecting in drops, flowed down her cheeks; her arms hung motionless at her side. The only way in which she received any benefit, was by unlacing her stays, and untying her clothes. When she recovered from the swoon, her first impulse was to look for me at her side, and there she always found me; sometimes, even when she retained a certain portion of sense and consciousness, she would stretch her hands round, without opening her eyes. The object of this action was so well known, that some nuns presenting themselves to her hand thus groping round,

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and

and not being discovered, because she then happened to relapse without motion, would say to me : Sister Susan, it is you she wishes, come here then..... I would place myself at her feet, lay her hand upon my forehead, and there it remained till her swoon subsided. When it was over, she would say to me : Ah, Sister Susan, it is I who am to go away, and you who are to remain behind ; it is I who am first to see her again ; I will speak to her of you, and she will weep when she hears your sad story ; if they still love in Heaven, surely it is no crime to weep. If tears sometimes are bitter, they are sometimes too delightfully sweet.... Then she reclined her head upon my neck, wept profusely, and added : Adieu, Sister Susan ; adieu my friend ; who will share your sufferings when I am no more ? Who?... Oh !

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my

my dearest friend, how I lament you ! I am about to leave you, I feel that, I am. If you were happy, how deeply should I regret to die !

I was extremely alarmed at her situation. I spoke to the Superior. I proposed that she should be taken to the infirmary ; that she should be exempted from attending at service, and from performing any of the laborious exercises of the house, and that a physician should be called. But I only received for answer that her complaint was nothing serious, that the fainting fits, to which she was subject, would go away of themselves ; and Sister Ursula was perfectly contented to discharge her usual duties, and to follow her ordinary course of life. One day, after matins, at which she had been present, she did not appear again as usual ; I conceived that she must be
very

very ill. When morning services were over, I flew to her apartment, found her lying upon the bed, dressed. When I entered, she said to me; Are you there, my dear friend? I feared greatly that you would be long in coming, and I expected you. With what impatience did I long to see you! My swoon was so severe, and so long, that I believed it was to continue for ever, and that I was never to see you more. Hold, there is the key of my oratory, open the drawers, raise a little board, which separates the drawer from below upwards, into two parts; behind this board you will find a packet of papers. I have never been able to summon sufficient resolution to part with them, in spite of the danger which keeping them occasioned; and, notwithstanding the grief with which the perusal of them was attended (alas! they are almost obliterated

obliterated by my tears), when I am no more, commit them to the flames..... She was so feeble, and so oppressed, that she was unable to pronounce together two words of this address. She hesitated between every syllable, and spoke so low too, that, although my ear was close to her mouth, I had the utmost difficulty in hearing what she said. I took the key, pointed with my finger to the oratory, and she made signs that I was right. Feeling now a presentiment that I was about to lose her, and persuaded that her malady was a consequence of mine, or occasioned by the fatigue she had undergone, or by the attention she had bestowed, I burst into a flood of tears, and yielded to the emotions of the most violent affliction; I kissed her forehead, her eyes, her face, her hands; I asked her forgiveness. Meanwhile she appeared totally absent ;

absent ; she did not hear me ; and one of her hands , moving gently backwards and forwards, stroked my face. I believe that she no longer saw me ; perhaps, even she imagined that I had gone away, for she called, Sister Susan ?— I said, Here I am.—What o'clock is it ?—It is half past eleven,—Half past eleven ! Go to dinner, go ; you will return immediately..... The bell rang for dinner, and I was obliged to quit her.— When I had reached the door she called me back, and I returned. She made an effort to present me her face, I kissed it ; she took my hand, and kept it fast locked in hers. She seemed unwilling, even unable, to leave me ; It must be, however, said she, as she let me go, it is the will of God ; adieu, Sister Susan, adieu. Give me my crucifix... I put it into her hand, and went away.

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When we were about to rise from table, I addressed myself to the Superior; I spoke to her, in presence of all the nuns, of the danger of Sister Ursula, and pressed her to judge of her situation in person. Very well; said she, we must see her. She went up stairs, accompanied by some others, and I followed. They entered her cell; poor Sister Ursula was no more; she was stretched upon her bed with her clothes on, her head reclining upon the pillow, her mouth and eyes shut, and the crucifix in her hand. The Superior coolly gazed upon her, and said: She is dead. Who could have imagined that she was so near her end? She was an excellent girl; let the bell toll her knell, and let her be buried.

I remained alone by her pillow. It is impossible for me to paint my sorrow, yet I envied her fate. I sat down be-

side her, I bathed her with my tears, I kissed her again and again, and spread the sheet over her face, the features of which now began to change. I then bethought me of executing the commission with which she had entrusted me. To prevent interruption in the discharge of this task, I waited till all the members of the house were employed at service, I opened the oratory, removed the board, and found a pretty large bundle of papers, which I burnt that very night. This young lady had always discovered a melancholy turn, and I do not recollect ever to have seen her smile, except once during her illness.

I was now left alone in the house, indeed in the world, for I now knew no human being that was interested in my fortune. I had heard no more of my advocate M. Manouri. I presumed,
either

either that he was discouraged by the difficulties with which he had to encounter, or that, distracted by amusement or business, the offers of service which he made me had escaped his recollection; nor did the supposition inspire me with any resentment. My mind naturally leans to indulgence; I can pardon any thing in mankind but injustice, ingratitude, and inhumanity. I therefore excused M. Manouri as much as I could; and all the people of fashion who had displayed so much alacrity in the course of my law-suit, and in whose memory I no longer existed; and among others, even you yourself, the Marquis of Croismare. Such was my state of mind when our ecclesiastical Superiors paid a visit to the house.

They enter, they traverse the cells, they question the nuns, they require
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an account both of the temporal and spiritual administration; and, according to the temper which they bring along with them to the discharge of this duty, they repair, or they increase the disorder. I now had an opportunity of again meeting the honest and rigid M. Hebert, with his two young and compassionate attendants. They seemed to recollect the deplorable state in which I had formerly appeared before them; their eyes glistened with tears, and I remarked the expressions of sympathy and joy upon their countenances. M. Hebert sat down, and placed me opposite to him. His two companions stood behind his chair, and their looks were fixed upon me. Sister Susan, said M. Hebert, pray how are you treated now?—I replied, Sir, I am forgotten.—So much the better.—And this is the utmost extent of my wishes; but
I have

I have an important favour to request of you, and that is to invite hither the mother Superior.—And why?—Because if any complaint happens to be made against her, she will not fail to ascribe it to me.—I understand; but still inform me of all you know concerning her.—Sir, I entreat you to call her, and that she may hear both your questions and my answers.—Tell us, nevertheless.—Sir, you seem desirous to ruin me.—No, entertain no apprehensions of any kind. From this moment she has no authority over you; before the end of this week you will be transferred to Sainte Eutropa of Arpajon. You have a good friend.—A good friend, Sir! I don't know who that can be.—It is your advocate.—M. Manouri?—He himself.—I did not imagine that he still kept me in remembrance.—He has waited upon your sisters, the Archbishop,

bishop, the chief President, and all who are remarkable for piety. He has lodged your dowry in the house I have mentioned, and you have now only a very short time to remain here. Thus, if you know that any disorder prevails, you may give me information of it, without exposing yourself to any disagreeable consequence; and I even require you to do so by your holy obedience.—I know of none.—What! since the loss of your suit, have they kept any measures at all with you?—They believed, and it was natural for them to believe, that I had been guilty of a fault in attempting to annul my vows, and I was obliged to ask the forgiveness of God.—But it is the circumstances of that proceeding which I wish to learn..... and saying this, he shook his head, knit his eye-brows, and I conceived that it was now in my power

to consign to the Superior a share of the stripes and the discipline which she had compelled me to undergo. This, however, was not my intention. The Archdeacon perceiving that he could obtain no satisfaction, left the room, with a recommendation of secrecy upon what he had told me of my translation to Saint Eutropa of Arpajon. As good M. Hebert walked alone through the passage, his two companions returned, and paid their respects to me in a manner extremely tender and affectionate. I am ignorant who they are ; but may God preserve to them that feeling and compassionate character which is so rarely to be found in their situation, and which so well becomes the depositaries of the weaknesses of mankind, and the intercessors for the mercy of Heaven ! I supposed that M. Hebert was employed in consoling, examining,

examining, or rebuking some other nun, when he again entered my cell. By what means, said he, did you become acquainted with M. Manouri? — In the course of my suit. — By whom was he recommended to you for the conduct of it? — By the President's lady. — You must have had frequent conferences with him in the course of your business. — No, Sir; I saw him very seldom. — How did you communicate to him your instructions? — By some memorials, written with my own hand. — You have preserved copies of these memorials? — No, Sir. — By whom were these memorials conveyed to him? — By the President's lady. — And how were you introduced to her acquaintance? — By Sister Ursula, my friend, and her relation. — You have seen M. Manouri since the loss of your suit? — Once. — That is very seldom.

You have never written to him? — No, Sir.—He will doubtless inform you of what he has done for you. I command you not to see him in the parlour, and if he writes to you, either directly or indirectly, to send me his letter without opening it; do you understand me? without opening it.—Yes, Sir; and I will obey you.—Whether the distrust of M. Hebert pointed to me, or to my benefactor, I was hurt by it.

M. Manouri came to Longchamp that very evening. I kept my word to the Archdeacon, and refused to see him. Next day he wrote to me by his messenger; I received his letter, and sent it unopened to M. Hebert. To the best of my recollection, this happened upon Tuesday. I expected, with the utmost impatience, the result of the promise of the Archdeacon, and the exertions of M. Manouri. Wednesday,
Thursday,

Thursday, Friday, passed without my hearing any thing upon the subject. How very tedious did these days appear to me ! I trembled, lest some obstacle had occurred to derange the whole plan. I was not to recover my liberty, but I was to change my prison ; and that is something. The first instance of good fortune inspires in our minds the hope of a second ; and this, perhaps, is the origin of the proverb, *That good luck seldom comes single.*

I was acquainted with the companions I was to quit, and I easily supposed that I should gain something by living among other prisoners. Be what they might, they could neither be more malicious nor worse-intentioned. On Saturday morning, about nine o'clock, a great commotion arose in the house. A very trifling matter serves to throw the heads of nuns into a ferment. They
went

went to and fro, they whispered; the doors of the dormitories opened and shut incessantly. This, as you will have observed from what I have already said, is the signal of monastic revolutions. I was alone in my cell. I waited in anxious suspense; my heart beat; I listened at the door; I looked through my window; I roamed about, without being conscious of what I did. Trembling with joy, I said to myself, It is me they are coming to seek, in a moment I shall be here no longer.... and I was not mistaken.

Two persons I had never seen presented themselves to me. They were a nun, and the girl who kept the turning box at Arpajon. In a single word they communicated to me the object of their visit. I collected in a hurry the few things that belonged to me, and threw them carelessly into the apron of the
5 girl

girl, who packed them up. I did not ask permission to see the Superior; Sister Ursula was no more; and I was therefore leaving nobody who cared for me, or whom I loved. I went down stairs; the doors were thrown open to me; after my packet was examined, I stepped into the coach, and away.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.